1. Introduction

The present article concentrates on research articles (RAs), in the context of English for Research Publication Purposes (Cargill & Burgess, 2008; Flowerdew, 2013; Martín, Rey-Rocha, Burgess, & Moreno, 2014). The present approach does not seek to dwell on a linguistic analysis (e.g. Pérez-Llantada, 2012), but on the way the declining quality of RAs has an impact on the progression of science in general. Undeniably, the problem of published sloppy science starts at the university with researchers’ productivity being measured in terms of their publication output (Lee, 2014; Wager, Singhvi & Kleinert, 2015, p.1). In this sense, the flux of conflicting ideologies and vested interests submits L2 university students (as well as senior researchers) to “[a] pure focus on scientific outputs [that] ignore the quality of those outputs.” (Bowen & Casadevall, 2015, p. 1). As universities become more stuck in the backwaters of profit-driven mechanisms of social and cultural selection, publishing conglomerates reinforce illusions of smartness and rigor through the reification of RAs within “leading research communities.” As Bowen and Casadevall (2015, p. 1) rightly observe, “[w]ith increasing competition for research grants and jobs, funders and employers have turned to measures of efficiency and productivity to evaluate scientists without taking into consideration, for example, the role of multitasking, i.e., “how professors allocate time between research and teaching duties” (Kossi, Lesueur, and Sabatier, 2015, p. 2).”

On the other hand, whereas many EAP writing courses privilege “clarity” (rhetorical simplicity) and “precision” (use of key concepts), high-tier academic journals demand different types of compact, inexplicit and non-elaborate prose accessible to expert readers. Although the pressure on researchers for publishing in English vary considerably depending on whether they work in or outside an English speaking country, the university they work in, the discourse and speech community they belong to, the community of practice to which articles are addressed (cf. Curry & Lillis, 2004), and of course, the journal in which their work appears, the dichotomy “novice/expert writer” (e.g., Basturkmen, 2009) that underpins every aspect of the writing-for-publishing process, is a wrong-headed theoretical construct that pushes forth fallacious models of success and rigor represented by RAs. If we were to take this characterization at face value, two politically incorrect questions would immediately arise. What, we might ask, is the counterpart of “the successful academic English writer” (Flowerdew, 2003)? How would be such success achievable in contexts in which, for example, EAP materials make just occasional use of specific publisher-friendly target structures (e.g. Hartig & Lu, 2014; Wood & Appel, 2014), or are unavailable? Inevitably, this raises important questions concerning the representativeness of those registers modeled by academic journals within non-native research communities. While it is beyond the scope of this article to empirically confirm relationships between patterns of hegemonic discourse and grammar, the existence of such relations is assumed throughout as an inevitable starting point for paradigmatic shifts in writing instruction (cf. Wingate, 2012).
2. Is ERPP the language of “good science”?

As both L1 and L2 speakers are increasingly pressured to produce linguistically suitable (publishable) research articles in academic English, the “expert writer paradigm,” modeled by scientific journals and EAP literacies (see Turner, 2012, for a definition), has morphed into an ideological tool that determines the shape of academic registers according to the alleged demands of global research communities (confounded with core research communities). Nativelike writing proficiency (“Englishization,” see Swales, 2004, p. 52) has thus been “commodified” (cf. Pérez-Llantada, 2012, p.3) to accommodate specific patterns of discourse consumption. In order to facilitate the production of research end-products (the research article), native English-speaking proofreading services have thus become a must in the contemporary research/writing workflow (promoted by editorial giants like Elsevier). The “expert writer” paradigm has thus gained momentum to the extent that it is impossible to identify the researchers’ true self from the standardized idiom promoted by language editing services and manuscript formatting. Further, “peripheral NNS research” has been dismissed as parochial, as it fails to address “current issues in the international community of scholarship” (Flowerdew, 2001, p. 135). Moreover, the “publish in English or perish in academia dilemma” (Bocanegra-Valle, 2014), or, as Flowerdew and Li (2009, p. 279) put it, “the privilege attached to publishing in internationally indexed journals,” has forced many non-native English speaking scholars to make career-wrecking decisions to pass the muster and obtain “too much too soon,” including plagiarism, language re-use (cf. Flowerdew & Li, 2007), and even data tampering and fabrication, citation bartering, forced guest authorship (see Wager et al., 2015), etc. Of course, as the Stapel fraud has proved (http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/neuroskeptic/2015/01/20/how-diederik-stapel-became-fraud/index.html), this is not exclusive of peripheral “sloppy science.”

On the other hand, the fits-all-size linguistic ideology propounded by ELT advocates downplays local needs by conflating them with a sanitized (ideology-free) version of English as a language for communication. The homogenizing nature of published research articles in mainstream/center journals (Salager-Meyer, 2014) comes far more forcefully to the foreground in the way literacy knowledge is theorized. For example, Wenger’s (1998) conceptualizations regarding the unconscious emergence of literacy knowledge, upholds acculturation among non-native English speakers as a means to achieve full-fledged memberships in a disciplinary community (Wenger, 2000). These communities of practice are organized around definitions of disciplinary grandiosity and glorification fantasies, common to contemporary organizations (see Alvesson, 2013). Crucially, as Gardner and Nesi (2013, p. 25) observe, student writer characterizations in contemporary higher education have drawn largely on subjective variables, like “intuition, the opinions of faculty, or data from course documentation and task prompts.” Fundamentally, definitions of language, science and learning relations at the corporate university in high-income countries (as well as in emerging research centers at the “periphery”), hinge on hunch and “[f]unctional stupidity [. i.e., an] organizationally-supported lack of reflexivity, substantive reasoning, and justification” (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012, p. 1198). Beneath these contradictory notions is the inflation of L2 language policies in euphemistically-called “educational contact zones” (Singh & Doherty, 2004). This phenomenon adopts many forms: Governmental linguistic policies blind to both teachers’ and learners’ actual needs (Belcher, 2009; Cassels Johnson, 2009; Burke, 2013; Norris, 2013); institutional top-down mandates aiming at “reproducing[ing] social hierarchies and dominance precisely by determining what linguistic practices may count as legitimate constructions of knowledge” (Stroud & Wee, 2007, p. 34); a bias against non-native-English-speaking students defined as “underprepared” L2 readers and writers (cf. Khami-Stein, 2003), or as “disadvantaged participants” (see Chang & Kanno, 2010, p. 671). Increasingly, then, universities around the globe endorse a discourse that mobilizes researchers’ desire of inclusion in “smart” academic communities, enshrined at the heart of homogenizing approaches to writing in “relation to rigid views of genre” (Nunn, 2009, p. 694). In this context, concepts like discourse competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia & Dörnyei, 1995; Council of Europe, 2001), textual competence (Bachman, 1990; Bhatia, 2004), or disciplinary culture (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995), to name only a few, become placibic “zero-sum games” (cf. Alvesson, 2013), supporting neoliberal interests in higher education institutions. The upshot is that in EAP settings, where English is used as a subject to enable students to read academic textbooks and probably to write academic articles, academic literacy practices are often divorced from discipline-oriented language policies (e.g. Cheng, 2008). The gap becomes glaring despite the spread of genre-driven approaches in EAP pursued by some practitioners and researchers in the belief that “genre-oriented instruction is one key to preparing students for the writing that they may be expected to produce during their academic career” (Molle & Prior 2008, p. 542).
The formulation of a de-essentializing literacy approach involving the use of publisher-friendly target structures as a model for EAP language instruction, does not simply entail variables of textual (re)production in specific registers, but, essentially, a critical analysis of science-oriented writing as a human commitment as subject to political considerations as any area of human endeavor. As we have seen, the research article epitomizes the shaky underside of contemporary scientific discourse; RAs act under an output-driven premise of orthodoxy that aims at stabilizing the opposing dynamics of conceptual cohesion and contingency of knowledge. Thus, whereas in the ideal the commodified article is apparently constructed as an open-ended dialogic medium (whereby the text becomes a stable and recognizable tool for knowledge exchange within research communities), in the real world, scientific impact on databases overrides societal impact (Jansen and Ruwaard, 2012). Ultimately, therefore, what makes the hegemonic discourse indefensible is its presumption that alterity/identity relationships are homogeneous objects, analyzable and malleable from a position of power at a central slot. In a nutshell, ERPP has become an instrument of power justified by appeals to linguistic neutral zones for the efficient exchange of value-free knowledge. As is the case with ELF, the focus in both EAP and ESP has been “on the ‘E’ (...) rather than on developing the relationship between English and in respect of the multilingualism of most ELF users and the ‘multicompetence of the community’” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 59). The consequences for science of the publish-or-perish system in non-native speaking research communities should not be taken for granted, solely from a linguistic perspective. As suggested, ERPP theory should integrate principled descriptions language, content, and research-making within local communities, and the way these elements are reflected by specific genres. Importantly, the relationship between research, research outputs, publishing impact must be acknowledged as a part of contemporary “expert writing.” In this sense, the definition of the type or types of texts to be included in EAP settings should be re-framed in terms of a) the text’s pertinence to a specific research field, b) the pedagogical adjustments involved in the selection of disciplinary-oriented texts, c) new paradigms of text complexity based not only on academic quality standards but on actual usage, and d) a connection to broader environmental factors, such as learning ecology, students’ expectations, learners’ L1 as a means rather than an obstacle to attain L2 proficiency, etc. By necessity, this learner-needs-based approach should move far beyond bridging “the gap between learners’ current and target competencies” (Belcher, 2009, p. 3), to embrace a deeper understanding of what learners are expected to do as writer-researchers. Moreover, the distinction between the professional scientific text and literacy knowledge, as a mediating stage between knowledge construction through writing and community-driven knowledge construction, should be addressed in terms of structured, field-specific conceptualizations rather than as language-only phenomena.

References


