**In-Class Exercise on Using Lexical Bundles**

**Rationale**

While there are certainly common features of academic writing across disciplines, it is also true that different fields use language in particular ways. In her chapter on using corpus linguistics in writing courses, Susan Conrad (2008) has observed: “In any discipline, the patterns of language features reflect not only the subject area, but the methods for building knowledge” (p. 121). In other words, incorporating specific language in the manner of the discipline contributes to meaning-making. Conrad (2008) adds:

Although most academic writing is similar in having few overt features of argument or persuasion, the language varies from discipline to discipline. This is obvious for vocabulary, but it is also true for grammar. The types of questions that a discipline addresses, the methods that are used to gather and analyze information, and even the type of information that is considered appropriate all affect language choices. (p. 121)

In order to make these choices, students need to recognize how language is used in a particular field, including lexical bundles such as “to the extent that.” A lack of familiarity with these features leaves students with fewer options for expressing themselves, resulting in choices such as using “I think” instead of “it may be that” (Conrad, 2008, pg. 125). Research by Cortes (2004) found that native speakers can also benefit from instruction in when and how to use lexical bundles.

**Activity**

* Examine an article in your discipline, preferably one assigned as course reading and/or one that would be a good model for students. Note the following:
  + How is tense used in different sections of the article? Are there patterns of use in particular sections such as Methods or Discussion?
  + Are there phrases (lexical bundles) which reappear throughout the article or which are common in your discipline? Examples may include: *it is important to, studies have shown that, as a result of, it is interesting to note, it may be that*, etc.
* Create a table based on the features you want students to notice. Depending on the discipline and type of article, this could be divided into sections of the article (i.e. Methods, Discussion, etc.).
* Ask students to complete the table and then discuss it as a class.

Sample table

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Language feature** | **Example** | **Location in article** | **Purpose of language** |
| Lexical bundle | “It is possible that” | Discussion | To hedge |
| Lexical bundle | “Does not appear to be” | Discussion | To hedge |
| Lexical bundle | “These results suggest that” | Discussion | To hedge |

**References**

Conrad, S. (2008). Myth 6: Corpus-based research is too complicated to be useful for writing teachers. In J. Reid (Ed.), *Writing myths: Applying second language research to classroom teaching* (pp. 115-139). University of Michigan Press.

Cortes, V. (2004). Lexical bundles in published and student disciplinary writing: Examples from history and biology. *English for Specific Purposes*, 23, 397-423. doi: 10.1016/j.esp.2003.12.001