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ACADEMIC GENRE PROCESSING STRATEGIES AMONG TERTIARY ESL READERS

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ACADEMIC GENRE PROCESSING STRATEGIES AMONG TERTIARY ESL READERS

BY

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Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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UPM

DEDICATION

In Memory of My Beloved Parents

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

ACADEMIC GENRE PROCESSING STRATEGIES AMONG TERTIARY ESL READERS

By

HAFIZAH LATIF

November 2009

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Faculty: Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication

In recent years, the genre-based approach has progressively made inroads into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and in particular English for Academic Purposes (EAP) research and practice to meet the learners' communicative needs. This study examined the reading processes of a selected group of tertiary students majoring in English Language Studies when reading a research article (RA) in their discipline of study. Using a case study method sited within the exploratory-interpretive paradigm, the present study qualitatively looked into the reading behaviours of six ESL readers with average command of the language while engaging with the RA vis-à-vis the strategies they utilized to comprehend the RA. The study also probed the readers' rhetorical awareness of the RA genre, the reading problems they faced, and how these factors have shaped their reading behaviours. Data were gathered via several instruments i.e., text-labelling and sequencing tasks, reading comprehension task, written recall task, think-aloud protocols, and retrospective interview. To complement the qualitative data, two surveys were conducted using the Revised Approaches to Studying Inventory (RASI) and the Metacognitive Awareness (MCA)

questionnaire involving 42 final year ELS students. The RASI was employed to examine the extent to which the subjects utilized certain approaches to their studying i.e., whether they employed a 'surface' or 'deep' approach in coping with their study tasks. The MCA was used to measure the students' perceptions about their metacognitive awareness when reading academic texts in the second language (L2).

The qualitative analysis revealed that the readers' dependence on 'local' or 'bottom-up' processing strategies had negatively affected their understanding of the RA and hence, their overall reading task performance. Results also indicated that their reading problems were probably caused by the presence of difficult words combined with the syntactic complexity peculiar to research genre in question as well as their unfamiliarity with research terminology. They generally seemed to possess some awareness of the rhetorical structure of the RA but their lack of understanding of the workings of this genre had quite clearly affected their comprehension and overall task performance. In the quantitative part of this study, the RASI survey indicated the students' relatively low academic self-confidence and a high tendency to adopt the 'surface' rather than the 'deep' approach in their learning. Analysis of the MCA responses revealed the students' equally low confidence levels when reading specialized academic text in the L2. Consequently, they were more inclined to use the 'local' strategies when reading the RA.

The findings of the study call for the implementation of an ESP/EAP genre-based framework in reading instruction to meet the readers' academic reading needs more effectively. Interventionist measures in the form of metacognitive strategy training and rhetorical consciousness-raising in L2 reading are equally crucial in that the

students can be trained to read like the more expert readers of the disciplinary community. Students should also be given guidance on the proper approaches to studying while at the university so that their study practices are consistent with the aims of higher education.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

STRATEGI PEMPROSESAN GENRE AKADEMIK DALAM KALANGAN PEMBACA BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DI UNIVERSITI

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Sejak beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini, pendekatan genre semakin memainkan peranan penting dalam bidang Bahasa Inggeris Untuk Tujuan Khusus (*English for Specific Purposes* - ESP) dan Bahasa Inggeris Untuk Tujuan Akademik (*English for Academic Purposes* - EAP) untuk memenuhi keperluan komunikatif para pelajar. Kajian ini telah menyelidiki proses membaca di kalangan pembaca Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua (*English as a Second Language* – ESL) di peringkat universiti apabila membaca genre akademik iaitu makalah penyelidikan (*Research Article* – RA) dalam disiplin pengkhususan mereka iaitu Pengajian Bahasa Inggeris (*English Language Studies* - ELS). Dengan menggunakan kaedah kajian kes dalam konteks paradigma terokaan-interpretif, kajian ini telah menyelidik secara kualitatif strategi membaca yang digunakan oleh enam orang pelajar ESL yang memiliki tahap penguasaan bahasa Inggeris yang sederhana semasa membaca dan memahami RA. Kajian ini juga telah meneliti tahap kesedaran retorik genre RA dalam kalangan pelajar serta masalah membaca yang mereka hadapi dan bagaimana kedua-dua aspek

ini mempengaruhi perlakuan membaca mereka. Data dikumpul melalui beberapa instrumentasi iaitu, tugasan melabel dan menyusun semula teks, kefahaman membaca, *written-recall,* protokol *think-aloud* dan temubual. Untuk melengkapi data kualitatif, dua tinjauan telah dilakukan yang melibatkan 42 orang pelajar-pelajar ELS tahun akhir dengan menggunakan dua set soalselidik iaitu *Revised Approaches to Studying Inventory* (RASI) dan *Metacognitive Awareness* (MCA). Soalselidik RASI digunakan untuk meninjau kaedah pembelajaran yang digunakan oleh para pelajar samada secara pendekatan permukaan atau pendekatan mendalam. Sementara soalselidik MCA digunakan untuk menilai persepsi para pelajar terhadap kesedaran metakognitif apabila membaca teks akademik dalam bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua.

Analisis kualitatif menunjukkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar kajian kes cenderung menggunakan strategi pemprosesan 'lokal' atau '*bottom-up*' yang menjejaskan kefahaman mereka dan seterusnya pencapaian mereka dalam tugasan membaca. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan masalah membaca yang dihadapi oleh para pelajar sebahagian besarnya berpunca dari kesukaran mereka dalam memahami kosakata, struktur ayat yang komplek yang sering digunakan dalam RA serta ketidakbiasaan mereka tentang terma-terma penyelidikan. Para pelajar juga didapati mempunyai tahap kesedaran secara umum sahaja mengenai genre RA dan kurang pengetahuan mendalam tentang bagaimana genre ini berfungsi. Ini juga telah menjejaskan tahap kefahaman membaca mereka dan pencapaian mereka dalam tugasan membaca pada keseluruhanya. Analisis data kuantitatif daripada RASI menunjukkan para pelajar mempunyai tahap keyakinan akademik yang rendah dan cenderung menggunakan pendekatan permukaan apabila belajar berbanding dengan pendekatan mendalam.

Dapatan dari tinjauan MCA juga menunjukkan tahap keyakinan diri yang rendah dalam kalangan pelajar apabila membaca teks akademik dalam bahasa kedua. Ini menyebabkan mereka cenderung menggunakan strategi lokal apabila membaca teks akademik seperti genre RA.

Dapatan kajian ini menyarankan supaya pengajaran kemahiran membaca dalam ESP/EAP menggunakan rangkakerja yang berasaskan genre demi untuk memenuhi keperluan membaca para pelajar dalam disiplin pengkhususan mereka dengan lebih berkesan. Kaedah-kaedah intervensi dalam bentuk latihan strategi metakognitif atau latihan yang meningkatkan kesedaran retorik dalam L2 adalah perlu supaya pelajar-pelajar dapat dilatih membaca sepertimana pakar dalam komuniti pengkhususan membaca. Para pelajar juga perlu dilatih supaya menggunakan pendekatan pembelajaran yang bersesuaian supaya amalan belajar mereka adalah konsisten dengan tujuan belajar di peringkat universiti.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on **12 November 2009** to conduct the final examination of Hafizah Latif on her thesis entitled "Academic Genre Processing Strategies Among Tertiary ESL Readers" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

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HAFIZAH LATIF

November 2009

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMEP	Adult Migrant Education Programme
ASI	Approaches to Studying Inventory
BAELS	Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies
BM	Bahasa Melayu
CALL	Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CON	Academic Self-Confidence
DA	Deep Approach
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELS	English Language Studies
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
FL	Foreign Language
KPLI	Kursus Perguruan Lepasan Ijazah
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LOD	Lack of Direction
LTM	Long term memory
MCA	Metacognitive Awareness
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
NSs	Native Speakers
NNSs	Non Native Speakers
RA	Research Article

RASI	Revised Approaches to Studying Inventory
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SoLLs	School of Language Studies and Linguistics
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
SPSS	Statistical Packages for Social Sciences
STM	Short term memory
STPM	Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia
STRA	Strategic Approach
SU	Surface Approach
TAP	Think-Aloud Protocol
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reading in English for Academic Purposes

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) which emerged as a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the 1980s is generally concerned with the teaching of communication skills in English to assist learners to study or conduct research in a formal education system (Jordan, 1997). Specifically, EAP is associated with language instruction and research which focuses on a certain communicative needs and practices of certain discourse communities in the academic context. The field of EAP has developed tremendously in the past 25 years and with the existing trend moving towards the globalisation of communication and information exchange, EAP has now become a "truly international phenomenon" (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001, p. xv). With the English language becoming the world's language of research and publication, EAP has now turned out to be a major force in English language teaching (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002). In line with this fundamental development, increasing number of higher educational institutions world-wide whether in English-speaking countries or otherwise, have increased their efforts in preparing their non-native speakers (NNSs) for academic study in English. The language skills that are central to academic purposes are listening and speaking, which are speech-based and reading and writing, which are text-based. Of all these four basic language skills, it can be said that reading skills rank as the greatest need of students especially in the context of higher education (Flowerdew and Peacock,

2001; Jordan, 1997; Johns, 1997). Effective reading in English is probably of paramount importance for students' academic success since "… in most EFL university situations, reading academic texts will be the biggest requirement for students" (Jordan, 1997, p. 50). Reading is a skill critically needed by students to achieve academic success (Grabe, 1986) since they acquire old or new information from various sources and the volume of reading they have to grapple with makes it imperative for them to master reading skills.

Majority of students who go through a transition from the secondary to tertiary education will face some problems in their studies while at the university (Radha, 2005; Hafizah Latif and Tg. Nor Rizan Tg. Mohd Maasum, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Johns, 1997; Jordans, 1997; Weir, 1983). The problems are mostly due to the 'hidden' prerequisite which they need to have i.e., a suitable repertoire of study skills in order to be successful at tertiary level. This is true where reading is concerned since students are expected to read a myriad of academic texts such as reference books, dissertations, or research articles which they had never encountered during their previous schooling years (Dhieb-Henia, 2003; Johns; 2002, 1997; Gow, Kember and Chow, 1991). They have to read lengthy texts to understand concepts and theories as well as expand their disciplinary knowledge. They need to perform various tasks such as interpreting, summarising and synthesising information from different texts and reproduce them in the form of written essays, reports or project papers (Broer, Aarnoutse, Kieviet and Van Leeuwe, 2002). Many seem to face difficulties coping with the reading demand in their studies (Huang, 2006; Dhieb-Henia, 2003; Hyon, 2002; Johns, 2002, 1997; Weir, 1983). Weir (1983) for example, had found that one of the problems faced by university students was difficulty with

the tasks which required skills and/or strategies for reading quickly and efficiently. Most students have never been exposed to the highly specialised materials and their inability to manage advanced academic texts could have prevented them from being able to handle these texts effectively (Huang, 2006; Hajibah Osman, 2004; Dhieb-Henia, 2003; Johns, 1997).

With the proliferation of information and communication technology which provides a new medium for written communication, university students have to refer to online documentations which require new sets of reading skills altogether. Thus, whether reading printed or online materials, they not only need to be familiar with the text sources, but they also need a repertoire of strategies to comprehend the content since different texts demand different processing skills. For example, reading 'pedagogical genres' such as textbooks or reading professional texts of academic faculty or 'faculty genres' such as the research article (Johns, 1997) would require somewhat different processing skills. A research article (henceforth RA) for instance, differs significantly from a textbook in terms of its content and purpose as well as in terms of its structural and textual organisation (Hyland, 2000; Kamberelis, 1999; Johns, 1997; Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990; Weissberg and Buker, 1990). Consequently, students who are unfamiliar with the rhetorical structures of different academic texts, and also who lack the suitable reading skills will face difficulties to comprehend these materials fully, not to mention while coping with the volume of reading that they have to do to fulfil the academic demands (Dhieb-Henia, 2003). Their problems are compounded further when reading materials in the second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) such as English. On this aspect, reading researchers have identified possible connections between L1 reading ability, L2 proficiency and L2