Classroom talk and the negotiation of academic English: A linguistic analysis of collaborative text creation

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of student:

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Date: June 22nd, 2015

Dedication and Acknowledgments

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Abstract

In Australia, a significant number of international students undertake intensive language instruction immediately prior to tertiary studies (Australia Education International 2014). These courses aim to prepare students for a successful university experience. Difficulties with academic writing pose a barrier to tertiary entrance and also to the completion of future studies, with emotional and financial ramifications for all those involved. With much at stake, effective support for academic writing development is an on-going concern for researchers and educators in many sectors including pre-tertiary teaching and learning contexts.

A substantial body of research has analysed the linguistic demands of texts that students are expected to write. However, fewer studies explore *how* the valued meanings of texts are negotiated through classroom interaction. In this study, I examine five lessons of a collaborative writing step, known as joint construction. In this kind of writing lesson the teacher takes a leading role as the class co-creates one communal text (Callaghan & Rothery, 1988; Rothery, 1996; Rose & Martin, 2012). Previous studies of joint construction with advanced English language learners have provided insight into the overall structure of lessons, the negotiation of social roles, and adaptations to online learning environments (Humphrey & Macnaught, 2011 who draw on Hunt, 1991, 1996; Dreyfus, Macnaught & Humphrey, 2011; Dreyfus, to appear). However, as yet, there is limited understanding of how meanings are negotiated to achieve the 'end product', i.e. the scribed text. There is also limited understanding of how language choices are related to each other as well as to future writing.

The study aims to better understand the process of co-constructing academic language. Classroom talk is analysed by using methods of qualitative phasal analysis (Gregory & Malcolm, 1995; Malcolm, 2010) and discourse semantics tools of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Martin, 1992; Martin & White, 2005; Martin and Rose, 2007). The transcripts and video recordings of joint construction lessons focus on three main aspects of collaborative text creation: what students

do; what teachers do to support student activity (without taking over); and how meanings are negotiated at the time of text creation (rather than through prospective or retrospective instruction). Findings illuminate reoccurring kinds of student activity, how classroom talk is structured to support the negotiation of meaning, and the scope of semiotic resources that teachers and students use to talk about language choices. Overall, findings provide insight into patterns of interaction that target the academic language development of students.