

# A Proposal for Critical-Pragmatic Pedagogical Approaches to English for Research Publication Purposes

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**Abstract:** Despite the increasing demands on many multilingual scholars outside the centre(s) of scientific knowledge production to publish their research in international scholarly journals, the support for such academic writing for publication is uneven at best. Existing English for research publication purposes (ERPP) instruction typically aims to aid multilingual scholars in achieving genre-based expectations and/or navigating the submission and review process, but it often does not address the politics of English-language knowledge production. In this paper, informed by an empirical case study and a theory building perspective, we address the need for a sustained program of courses/workshops for multilingual scholars in the (semi-) periphery and propose a means of operationalizing a critical-pragmatic approach to such course/workshop content. Our empirically-driven model is informed by the results of a recent case study investigation into an intensive ERPP intervention designed to address multilingual Spanish-speaking L1 scholars' challenges with writing research articles for publication in indexed (Web of Science) international scientific journals. Our model lays the groundwork for a more critical approach to ERPP pedagogy, one that attempts to attend more fully to the needs of multilingual scholars within an asymmetrical market of global knowledge production.

**Keywords:** English for research publication purposes; English as an additional language; academic writing; second language writing; English language teaching; English as a second language; English as a foreign language; scientific writing; science publishing

## 1. Introduction

Publishing research papers in international scholarly journals has increasingly become the most important benchmark of faculty worth and, in a number of disciplines, a requirement of doctoral program completion [1–3]. The impetus to publish research papers is entangled in *systems* of recognition that accrue when publishing in high prestige journals, which are, almost inevitably, in English. This recognition occurs simultaneously at three scales. Recognition accrues to the scholar, to the institution of higher education where she or he works or studies, and to the country in which that institution is located. This recognition is made visible in systems of rankings where institutions and countries are rated based on their performance. Each research paper published in a Web of Science journal is counted in metrics within the nation and in comparisons among nations. Due to this multiple importance, no longer can a scholar's effort to publish in English be understood as motivated simply by a desire to disseminate new research to a wide scholarly audience. Faculty and students are also motivated, even pressured, to publish in English language journals because of the effect on institutional

and national prestige [4,5]. The impetus to publish research in English-language journals extends well beyond Anglophone countries to global scholars and institutions across Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where English is often an additional language used by multilingual scholars.

The effort to publish in English can be more burdensome for scholars who use English as an additional language [6,7]. Writing, in general, is known to be more difficult and often less effective in a person's second language [8]. Writing at the sophisticated level of research publications is, generally, a more difficult endeavour that creates more anxiety and often results in less satisfaction than writing scholarly papers in the researchers' first language [9,10]. International scholars face not only the challenge of producing rigorous scientific data, but also the (potentially burdensome) task of writing papers that meet the English-language expectations of journal editors and reviewers [9,11].

This gap between the desire for scholars outside the Anglo-dominated centre(s) of knowledge production to write English-language scientific manuscripts and the concomitant burden of producing them for publication in internationally recognized journals has motivated the creation of several interventions. Courses [12], workshops [13], editorial mentorship [14], and editorial services see extensive listing [15], and self-study guides [4,16] focus on helping multilingual scholars meet the genre-specific expectations of research article writing and/or developing the social networks necessary to navigate this publication process [4,13]. Empirical research into these varied interventions reported from global contexts suggests their potential in increasing scholar confidence with research article writing [12,17,18]. Rarely, though, are these interventions offered in a systematic fashion in order to support scholars based outside of the "centre" in developing their ability to write research for publication in English [19–21].

Recently, some scholars within the field of applied linguistics have addressed this gap by calling for a more empirically driven and "critical-pragmatic" approach to guide the creation and content of English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP) pedagogical interventions [4,22,23]. This critical pragmatic approach addresses not only meeting the normative codes and conventions of academic research article writing but also attending to the particular practices and politics surrounding multilingual scholars' writing for publication within an asymmetrical market of global knowledge production [24].

In this paper, informed by an empirical case study and a theory building perspective, we address the need for a sustained program of courses/workshops for multilingual scholars in the global (semi-) periphery and propose a means of operationalizing a critical-pragmatic approach to such course/workshop content. Our empirically driven model is informed by the results of a recent case study investigation into an intensive ERPP intervention designed to address multilingual Spanish-speaking L1 scholars' challenges with writing research articles for publication in indexed (Web of Science) international scientific journals. This data, alongside existing research in the field, underlies our proposal for what a critical pragmatic curriculum could look like. Avoiding a "one size fits all" proscription, we suggest what such a critical, pragmatic curriculum could look like in a Mexican context and discuss how this model *may* be adopted to fit other similar contexts in the global (semi-) periphery of knowledge production. Our model is not intended as wholesale curriculum; rather we propose a pedagogy of ERPP from which further theory can be built that accounts for subjectivity, linguistic diversity, sociopolitical asymmetries, and scientific knowledge dissemination.

## 2. Context and Methods

### 2.1. Mexico University Academic Writing for Publication Course

Since its inception in July of 2011, an ERPP course has been offered to aid emerging and established scientists at Mexico University (MU). Titled "Academic Writing for Publication", the course has been delivered as either a two- or a three-week intensive program covering the three pillars of knowledge deemed necessary by the course designers: (i) principles of academic writing; (ii) structure and style of a scientific research article; and (iii) academic grammar. Content reflecting a genre-based pedagogy

focused on building scholar awareness of the codes and conventions of scientific writing (see [16] for the gold standard of such an approach) is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Breakdown of Content Offered in Mexico University’s Three-week Academic Writing for Publication Course.

Week 1: Principles of Academic Publishing	Week 2: Structure and Style of a Research Article	Week 3: Academic Grammar
Abstracts, Ethical issues, Readership and Audience, Citation and influence, Citations, References and bibliographies, Submission cover letter	Overview of structure, Introduction, Literature Review, Methods, Results/Discussion, Conclusion, Concision and coherence, Figures and Tables, Summarizing, Paraphrasing and synthesizing.	Parts of Speech, Word Order, Verb tenses and aspect, Sentence structure, S-V agreement, Active <i>versus</i> Passive Voice, Punctuation, Common sentence errors

## 2.2. Participants and Data Collection

Responding to calls from ERPP scholars for increased empirical focus on the efficacy of pedagogical interventions [19,20], this case study examined the MU ERPP course over seven iterations of its implementation between 2011 and 2014. Data collection tools included three classroom observations of each section of one iteration of the course (2013), a post-course survey completed by 54 of a possible 110 graduate student and faculty course participants (2013–2014), as well as semi-structured interviews with those associated with the course. As outlined in Appendix A, semi-structured interview and post-course survey data were gathered from 72 study participants associated with the ERPP course, including 54 course participants, of whom 34 were emerging (PhD students) scientists and 20 were established (faculty supervisors) scientists, as well as four course administrators/designers, seven course instructors, and seven international scientific journal editors (guest speakers who attended one day of each course). The post-course survey included questions aimed at gathering background descriptive statistical data on participants, including their proficiency self-ratings, previous exposure to formal English and writing instruction, and their record of publication in English and Spanish. The survey also included Likert-scale questions aimed at gathering attitudes towards English, the increasing expectations for publishing in English, the major challenges in writing for publication, and, finally, the perceived effectiveness of the course in attending to scholars’ writing for publication needs. Overall, this study attempted to better understand stakeholder perspectives on (i) the increasing pressure to publish in English language scientific journals; (ii) the major challenges facing multilingual scholars in achieving this publication; and (iii) the efficacy of an intensive ERPP course in addressing these challenges.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Multilingual Scholar Perceptions

Regarding the pressure to publish in English, MU scientists reported a grudging acceptance of the growing importance of English as a language of scientific communication. Major challenges were identified as a set of discursive and non-discursive challenges/issues that they face in attempting to achieve publication of research articles. The ERPP course itself reportedly provided them with greater confidence in attending to both the genre-specific norms of scientific articles as well as navigating the article submission process (see Table 2 for findings overview). Overall, both emerging and established scientists reported receiving a boost in confidence as a result of taking the course. The overall perceived efficacy of the MU course design and content supports previous research findings into the efficacy of genre-based, pragmatic ERPP instruction [12,17].

However, there are a number of concerns the emerging and established scientists reported which were never addressed in course content (see Table 2). Their reported perceptions indicate a broad undercurrent of frustration and resentment among MU scholars at the increasing expectations for

publishing in indexed journals, insufficient ERPP support at the institutional and departmental levels, and what they view as “bias” against them at international scientific journals. Scientific journals editors interviewed in this study categorically deny such bias and, indeed, suggest that they go to great lengths to include international scholars’ participation in their respective journals. This disparity in perception(s) between MU scientists and scientific journal editors highlights a problematic gulf in the perceived/actual (in) equity in global dissemination of scientific knowledge. While this gulf is in great need of further research across disciplines, the mere perception among scholars of such inequity—combined with frustration at the lack of ERPP support—suggests a potential space for pedagogy aimed at addressing these scholar concerns.

**Table 2.** MU scholar perceptions of English and ERPP, ERPP challenges, and ERPP course efficacy.

RQ#1: Perceptions of English and ERPP	RQ#2: Perceptions of ERPP Challenges Facing MU Scholars	RQ#3: Perceptions of MU Course
English seen as increasingly important for scientific career advancement.	Discursive: achieving clarity of research purpose and importance; achieving structural and rhetorical expectations.	Increased confidence among scholars.
Grudging acceptance of English as hyper-dominant language.		Increased ability to attend to genre-specific expectations.
Frustration at growing publishing expectations.	Non-discursive: Lack of ERPP exposure, writing opportunities, writing time, and writing support.	Increased ability to deal with navigation of article submission and review processes.
Frustration at perceived name and region “bias” against MU scientists.	Both discursive and non-discursive: Navigating the article submission and review process.	Frustration at lack of greater connection with desired research communities.
Frustration at lack of institutional and departmental ERPP support.		Frustration at lack of post-course ERPP support.

Overall, the findings from this study potentially add validity to theoretical positions of prominent applied linguistics scholars who have suggested inequity in global scientific knowledge production [3,25], including in Latin American contexts [9,26]. Alongside other recent empirical work investigating both the efficacy of ERPP interventions [13,17,27], as well as global scientists’ experiences with writing research articles for publication [11,23,28], findings suggest the need for a more critical focus on sustainable writing for publication practices and processes. That critical focus would include an explicit emphasis on the politics of this knowledge production in an era of English language hegemony and the increasing centripetal pull towards normative writing practices [29]. However, what would such a focus entail?

### 3.2. Operationalizing Critical–Pragmatic Approaches to ERPP Instruction

While applied linguists and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioners largely agree that there are distinct obstacles for multilingual scholars [20], particularly those writing from the global periphery or semi-periphery [25,29], how best to assist these scholars in achieving publication remains very much an open question. Different avenues of support have been examined in several recent papers and books, including overcoming linguistic/rhetorical obstacles [12,30,31], grappling with multiple identities [32], dealing effectively with journal gatekeepers [4,16,33], promoting network positioning [4,13], and utilizing or resisting policy imperatives [5,21,34]. Additionally, courses, workshops and other interventions have been mounted and discussed in the literature [12–14,17,27,35,36]. These interventions and initiatives can be characterized by at least three different approaches to ERPP: pragmatic, critical, and critical–pragmatic.

As argued by Flowerdew [37] and Hanauer and Englander [9], a critical pragmatic approach to ERPP integrates two somewhat dichotomous approaches. A pragmatic approach presumes that scholars should wholly adopt Western, “centre”, English-language models of research papers and

attempt to replicate these genres without discussion of the politics and ideologies surrounding these choices e.g., [16,17,38]. A critical approach argues that scholars should consider the socioeconomic politics and ideologies surrounding language choice and resist constrictive norms by maintaining their L1 voice and perspective. This approach places more onus on journal editorial committees to embrace diverse and divergent forms of English-language research papers [2,11,39,40]. A critical pragmatic approach to ERPP “encourages [writers] to assess their options in particular situations rather than assuming they must fulfill expectations. After considering options, they may choose to carry out demands or challenge them” (Benesch, 2001, p. 64) [41]. This approach attempts to “synthesize the preoccupation with difference inherent in critical pedagogy and the preoccupation with access inherent in pragmatic pedagogy” (Harwood and Hadley, 2004, p. 366) [42]. It encourages international scholars to have “a critical mind set” and at the same time, alert them “to the possible repercussions of some of the critical actions” (Flowerdew, 2007, p. 23) [37].

So, what exactly could a critical, pragmatic approach look like in practice? We propose empirically driven, context-specific approaches to operationalizing critical, pragmatic ERPP support. These approaches should maintain what appear to be the essential elements of genre-based and pragmatic instruction while concurrently raising awareness of the politics surrounding language choice(s) within an asymmetrical global market of scientific knowledge production. We propose an instructional approach that includes the elements of genre-specific instruction and pragmatic elements of managing submission and review processes which are found in many materials within the pragmatic approach (e.g., [16,43]). However, in addition, each of these instructional elements would be presented from a critical angle that examines these elements in terms of increasing global English hegemony in knowledge production, resulting power relationships between centre and (semi-) periphery scholars, and author agency within particular institutional and global contexts of knowledge production. We contend that such an overt examination of global scholars’ positioning within the political landscape of global knowledge production is necessary as an embedded part of ERPP course content so that participants begin to make the informed choices of compliance, resistance or amalgam that Benesch [41,44] refers to when describing a critical EAP.

To operationalize a critical-pragmatic approach, we have identified possible discussions that could take place while still attending to multilingual scholars’ genre-specific and pragmatic needs (See Table 3). Using elements #2 and #3 as example foci, we suggest including a comprehensive section in an ERPP course that focuses on pragmatic organizational and structural features, including the standard rhetorical “moves” and elements of an English language scientific research article as well as particularly problematic rhetorical elements for EAL scholars. However, an additional critical slant to this instructional element would include demonstration and discussion of variability in these elements. Potentially instigated by corpus-based analysis previously suggested by Harwood and Hadley (2004) [42]—of a variety of discipline-specific research articles published in indexed journals by English L1 and L2 authors—this discussion would include a broader dialogue/conversation of multilingual scholars’ alignment with and/or contravention of these conventions. The discussion would also examine how such standard *vs.* non-standard language use may be received by gatekeepers at international scientific journals. This would be an ideal opportunity to introduce the notion of English as a *lingua franca* in academic settings (ELFA) and have scholars consider their written production in light of non-standard forms seen in published research articles in their respective fields [27,45,46].

This critical discussion and analysis could encourage multilingual scholars to consider their written production in a more positive, legitimate light, thereby opening up greater opportunities for increased self-efficacy and stronger author voice. An additional benefit of such instruction and self-reflection could be that scholars deal more confidently and effectively with feedback from international journal reviewers and editors, something noted as a significant challenge to scholars writing for publication from the global (semi-)periphery [11,24,37].



**Table 3.** Critical, Pragmatic English for Research Publication Purposes Pedagogy.

Element Number	Genre-based and Pragmatic Instructional Elements	Critical Slant
1	Focus on scientific research article as means of communicating with particular discourse communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Discuss dynamic meaning-making potential of language.</li> <li>* Discuss politics of language choice within global market of knowledge production.</li> <li>* Discuss options for communicating with various discourse communities within the constraints of institutional and national evaluation schemes.</li> </ul>
2	Focus on the organization (genre) structure(s) of a scientific research article.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Discuss evolution and limitations of normative structure of research article.</li> <li>* Discuss the characteristics of published papers and authors that defy the convention.</li> </ul>
3	Focus on rhetorical elements of a scientific research article, including L1-L2 differences and traditionally problematic rhetorical features for Spanish L1 scholars.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Demonstrate variability in rhetorical features of scientific writing.</li> <li>* Discuss English as a Lingua Franca and how rhetorical, lexico-grammatical, and stylistic features may be taken up by gatekeepers.</li> </ul>
4	Focus on stylistic elements of a scientific research article.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Discuss style in relation to identity and author voice.</li> </ul>
5	Focus on lexico-grammatical elements of scientific writing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Discuss notions of “accuracy” and “intelligibility” in relation to “ideological” native English speaker norms.</li> </ul>
6	Focus on navigating the submission and review process, from identifying appropriate journals and conversations to effectively adapting to editor and reviewer feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Discuss ideologies of textual adjudication by journal gatekeepers.</li> <li>* Discuss global politics of publishing: access, scope, <i>etc.</i></li> <li>* Discuss ideologies of evaluation schemes in relation to rankings, impact factor, h-index, <i>etc.</i></li> <li>* Discuss what constitutes appropriate L1 and L2 journals for submission purposes.</li> <li>* Discuss how to influence reconfiguration of evaluation schemes to better recognize multilingual publishing practices.</li> </ul>
7	Focus on manuscript production and revision—supported by content, language, and publishing experts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Discuss how to advocate for and mobilize greater institutional and departmental writing for publication support.</li> <li>* Discuss notions of collaboration, knowledge production and author voice during manuscript production and revision.</li> </ul>
8	Focus on developing and effectively utilizing networks of “literacy brokers”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Discuss advocating for and mobilizing intra- and inter-institutional resources (e.g., translators, editors, <i>etc.</i>).</li> <li>* Discuss strategies for identifying, developing, and utilizing academic networks.</li> </ul>

Along the same lines, such a critical approach (as highlighted in element #6 of Table 3) would also encourage reflection and dialogue concerning particular “ideologies” of language(s) that may affect the adjudication of scientific research articles by gatekeepers at international journals [11,24]. Such inclusive dialogue between scholars, ERPP instructors, and journal editors (guest speakers), if conducted in a transparent manner and in a collegial tone, could lead to not only more sustainable and effective production and revision processes among the multilingual scholars but also assuage many of their concerns regarding equity in adjudication. A starting point for such discussion could be the dreaded feedback that many scholars report receiving: “Please check English language use and re-submit”. Attending to more qualitative feedback in an analytical fashion in the course could foster improved self-editing skills while encouraging scholars to consider how their texts were taken up by editors and/or reviewers. Although the intensive ERPP course offered by MU did not employ such an explicit focus on the politics and practices of revision and adjudication, we see great potential in such pedagogical practices in terms of encouraging greater critical self-reflection on the part of scholars, instructors, and journal gatekeepers.

Deliberately incorporating discussions that address the politics of academic knowledge production from a *critical slant* is crucial. In theory, such an approach prepares multilingual (semi-) periphery scholars to (better) navigate the article production, submission, and revision processes while, in an explicit manner, attending to potential scholar concerns regarding (in)equity and (lack of) diversity in global knowledge production. The suggested critical-pragmatic model could make an ERPP course more satisfying and empowering for multilingual scholars than courses simply focused on how to meet the codes and conventions of academic writing for publication in English. Such a model as outlined in Table 3 is by no means fixed and is indeed meant to be flexible for potential adoption by pedagogues and policy-makers globally. Further, we propose such a flexible model aware of the finite resources and time constraints inherent in such academic writing support courses and workshops. As such, consideration must be given to what can realistically be accomplished in an often (insufficiently) short period of time. We, nonetheless, suggest that our critical, pragmatic model can provide the conditions for sustainable writing for publication among populations of multilingual scholars such as the health and life scientists at MU.

#### 4. Concluding Thoughts

We conclude this paper with a call to action. While there has yet to be a definitive study on the inherently unequal relations of power within global scientific knowledge production, a growing body of evidence suggests the (often, but not always) disadvantaged position of multilingual scholars (particularly those working in the global (semi-) periphery). These unequal relations of power amid a growing asymmetrical global market of production suggest an ethical imperative for policy and pedagogy aimed at addressing these imbalances and inequities. A start to this “reckoning” is a more critical approach to applied linguistics by those of us responsible for driving and enacting policy and pedagogy: a critical, self-reflexive approach that holds central notions of equity and diversity within a world of growing inequity and increasing linguistic hegemony and homogeneity.

Pragmatic approaches within ERPP are by now quite well established. We argue that such approaches should be complemented by critical ERPP support in courses and workshops in order to attend more fully to the concerns of multilingual scholars tasked—such as those at MU—with the challenge of publishing their research in English as an additional language. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, such critical, pragmatic, and sustainable ERPP support is dependent not only on multilingual scholars and EAP/ERPP instructors, but also on policy makers at the institutional level. It is our hope that continuing research into multilingual scholars’ experiences with writing for publication alongside that focused on the potential and efficacy of global ERPP interventions can spur on sustainable support at MU and beyond.

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#### Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

EAL	English as an Additional Language
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ERPP	English for Research Publication Purposes
MU	Mexico University

## Appendix A

Overview of Participants and Data Collection Tools.

Participant Group	Individual Interviews	Focus Group Interviews	Post-Course Survey	Classroom Observations
Course Administrators	4			
Course Instructors	7			9 (3 per instructor)
Faculty supervisors	8 faculty; 1 post-doc		15 faculty; 1 post-doc	
Graduate students	17 PhD; 3 MSc	4 PhD; 1 MSc	32 PhD; 6 MSc	
Scientific journal editors (guest lecturers)	7			
Total participants	47	5	54/110	3

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