



Language Policy & Assessment Practices

Experiences with formative language assessment
for students and academic staff in EMI programmes

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University of Groningen

- Research university, 5,000 international students, 25% study abroad
- > 120 nationalities
- 35% 'international' academic staff
- 107 Master's, 21 Bachelor's programs, 11 Joint programs in English
- good position in international rankings, proposed branch campus in China

Context = INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION



[Internationalisation of Higher Education is] the **intentional** process of **integrating** an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.

de Wit et al. 2015; based on definition by Knight 2004; 2012

What about the Language dimension?

International University project (IntlUni)

Strategies for ensuring this kind of environment include ... linguistically and culturally preparing relevant administrative staff, teachers and students to function interculturally using an academic *lingua franca* in a multilingual and multicultural environment. (Cozart *et al* 2015: 20)

(see also link: www.intluni.eu)

International Classroom project at University of Groningen: **findings of pilots**

- > vision on internationalisation at faculty and programme level can be enhanced
- > high impact of Dutch culture (local, disciplinary, academic)
- > diversity can be used more as a resource
- > learning outcomes based on international frameworks but not explicitly global and intercultural
- > **support required (tailor-made and integrated) for language and intercultural competences**
- > important role for students (study associations)

Language & Culture Policy (UoG)

'**For staff**, to establish an overall quality control framework for assessing and monitoring (in terms of "CAN DO") the English of all staff (academic and administrative) and **provide adequate feedback and support** (CAN DO statements refer to competences defined in the CEFR, 2001).'

University of Groningen Language Policy Task Force (2014)

(See also Haines & Dijk, forthcoming; Haines *et al* 2013; Dimova & Kling 2015)

Language & Culture Policy (UoG)

'For students, their language proficiency should be assessed in relation to the specific programme entrance requirements and learning outcomes/graduate attributes. The "Can do" descriptors from the European Framework should be used for assessment in addition to international tests to further develop academic communication and study skills throughout the programme.'

Language Policy Task Force (2014)

Catalyst function (CEFR)

The CEFR as an awareness raising tool and a **catalyst** for the involvement of a wider group of stakeholders across our institutions.

It can be used to bring **legitimacy** to language provision and to place discussions about students' language development on the agenda:

“They need to be C1 by year 3...”

“But do we know what C1 actually means?”

It gives us access to people and makes us **credible** partners in discussions on policy and practice.

Policy and Practice: The Language Centre

The **EMBED project** “gave us the opportunity to develop local, contextualized samples of academic writing that would support the training and standardization of university teachers of English in the use of CEFR descriptors in the assessment of academic essays.”

Haines *et al* 2013: 78 (on *EMBED*)

EMBED project samples are now incorporated into **MAGICC**

Transparency Tools (Estelle Meima)

(MAGICC 2015; Natri & Räsänen 2015)

Language profile

Typical student levels for 'general English' at entry:

Reading C1

Listening C2

Speaking C1

Writing B2

But limited if any experience of **academic speaking/writing** – needs to be C1...?

(e.g. Reports and Essays CEFR 2001: 62)

International Classroom: Student perspectives

“In the International Baccalaureate I had learnt to write essays, to structure essays, to express myself in essays. So since I had done the IB I knew how to write an essay and I knew how to put my ideas down nicely. And I thought there was quite some discrepancy in the quality of the essays.”

Vincent, Lithuanian Medical Bachelor’s graduate

International Classroom: Student perspectives

“They expect you to be able to do academic writing, but you have never done it before. There’s also a lot of diversity in what has been done before. It would be the first time for me to do it in Dutch too, although the language would be a lot better.”

Vera, 2nd Year Dutch Medical Bachelor’s student

International Classroom: Student perspectives

So there are large variations in proficiency (largely B2 to C1) and in confidence:

Assuming we define the students needing the support, language experts will usually prioritize (EAP) support and feedback to Vera rather than Vincent... and we may assume (and hope) that Vincent is doing 'OK'.

But 99% of feedback on academic writing in the university is given by content teachers - from their disciplinary perspectives. And Vincent gets this feedback too...

Teaching & Learning: What occurs?

Students: read, summarise, discuss in pairs, present, discuss in group, read more, present again, discuss with expert, **receive feedback** (listen), write draft, etcetera

Content teachers: provide access to expert knowledge, facilitate the group process, act as sounding board (listen), **give constructive feedback, assess**, etcetera

Observations of learning/teaching activities in two EMI sites at University of Groningen (Medical Science Groups/Product Design Groups) 2014

“I don’t teach language”

“I cannot say that I test them or train them in English. Of course they can always come and ask me., but I don’t think I take responsibility for training them in English. I don’t correct their work in English”.

Physics lecturer cited in Airey 2012: 75

Feedback (research training report)

	Notes	Assessment
Introduction & research question	Contains good elements but logical structure lacking. English not fluent. Referencing limited	7
Data processing	Excellent. Only figure legends could have been better.	9
Discussion and Conclusion	Adequate but without creative new thoughts. Discussion of X types between Y and Z lacking.	7
Form and structure, inc. correct use of language	OK	Sufficient
Work attitude	Good	Good
Final mark		8

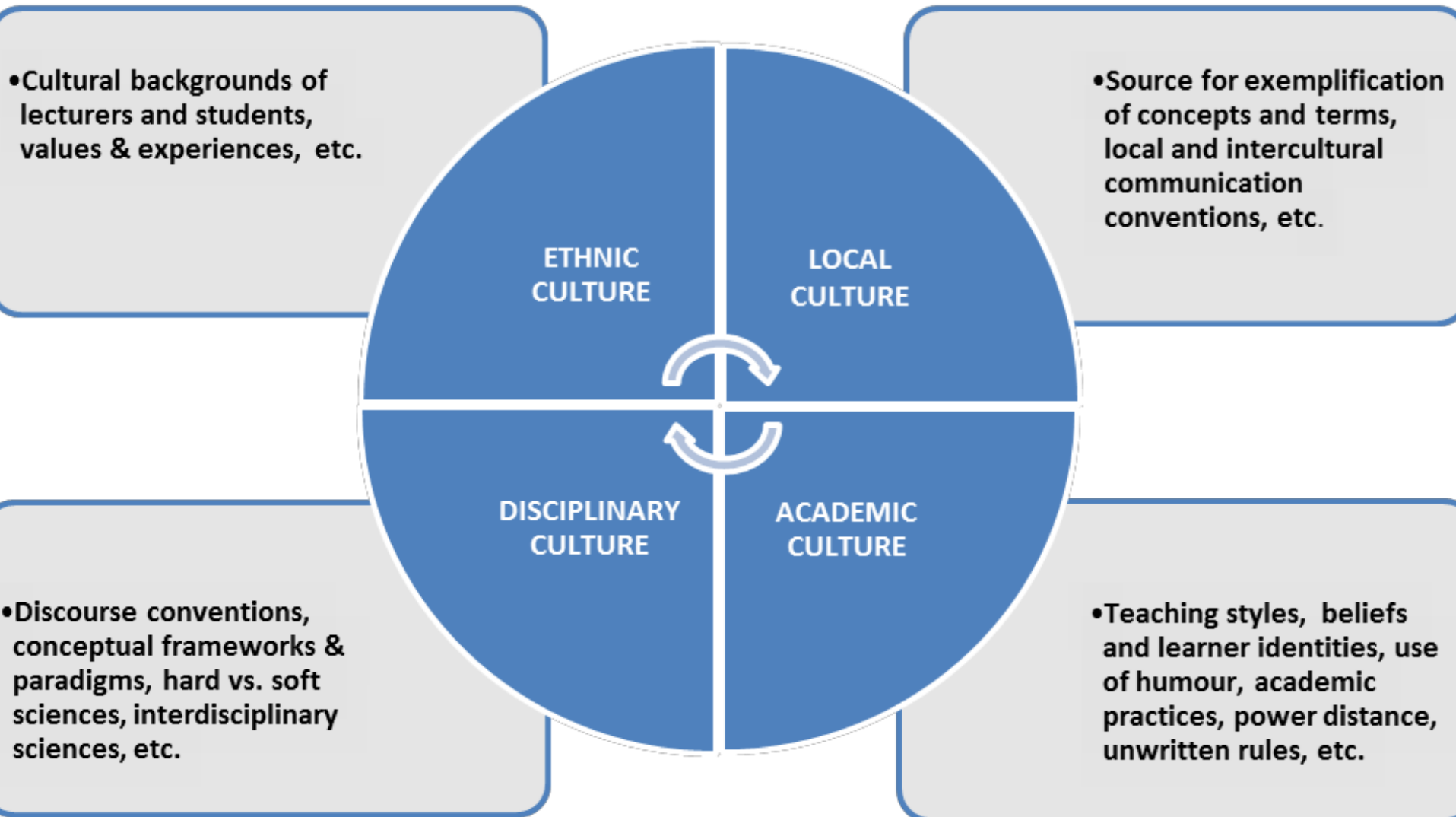
Elon Statement on Writing Transfer

“Writers consistently draw on prior knowledge in order to navigate within the various contexts for writing and learning ... Prior knowledge is a complex construct that can benefit or hinder writing transfer.”

Elon University 2013: 4

Cultures in the international university

Räsänen (2011, after Flowerdew & Miller 1995)



International Classroom: Student perspectives

So in the case of Anna's academic writing:

- what is a language issue?
- what is a cultural issue?
- what is a general academic issue?
- What is a discipline specific issue?

AND

- Who gives her feedback - and on what?



Modularising Multilingual and Multicultural Academic Communication Competence

- Enables shared understanding of reference levels and transnational harmonisation of alternative forms of assessment
- Supports recognition of students' multilingual and multicultural profile, and **renders it visible to third parties**



8.3.1 Academic and professional writing skills in at least three languages (including L1) with 2 languages at B2

Learning outcomes for both general academic context & discipline-specific context

e.g. “in different languages, communicate conceptual information in one’s field, using references and citations properly ... respecting discipline-specific and intercultural discourse conventions of writing in that field...”



8.3.1 Academic and professional writing skills in at least 3 languages (including L1) with 2 languages at B2

Assessment criteria grid (including):

- Macro-readability
- Topic content
- Thematic development (logical organisation, coherence and cohesion)
- Micro-readability (grammatical accuracy)
- Micro-readability (vocabulary control and range)

Relevant for cooperative assessment by both language and content teachers.

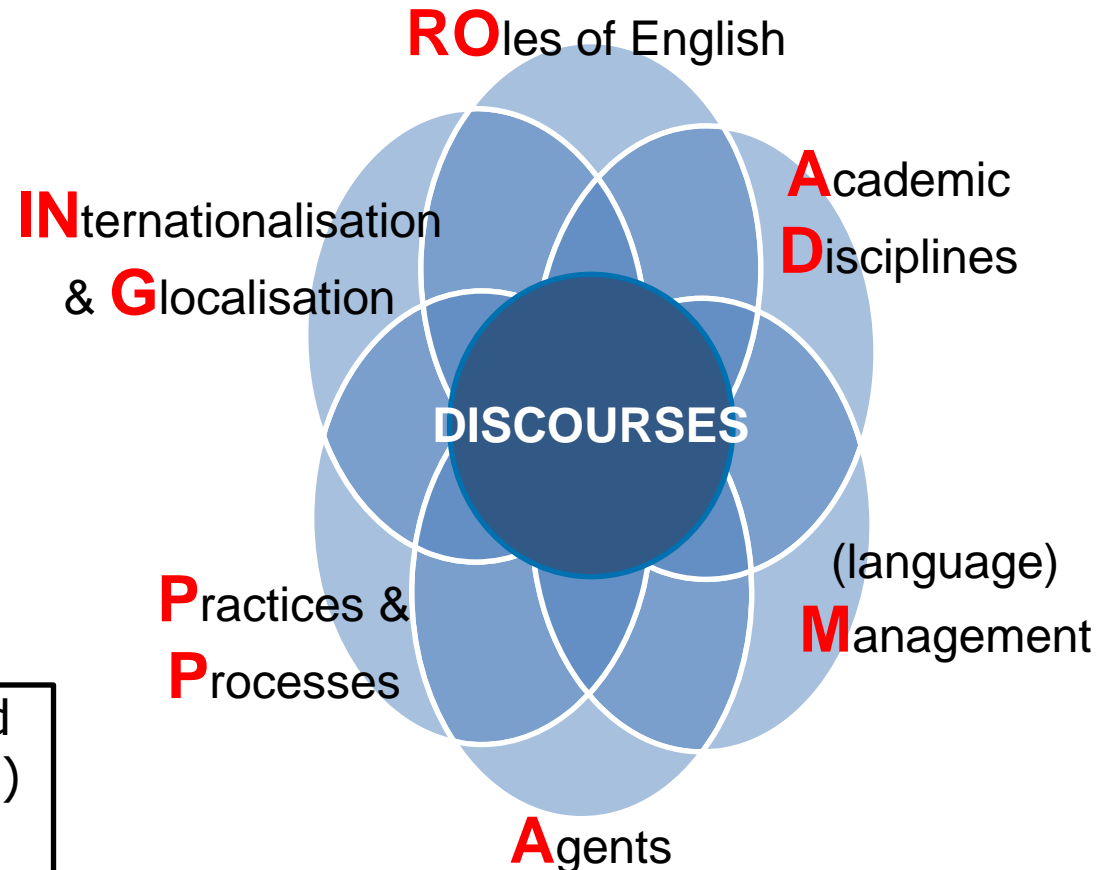
Language & Culture Pilot at UoG

When grading and giving and receiving feedback on academic writing: **whose values?**

- disciplinary, academic, inter-cultural?

1. Definition of writing assignments in the academic writing line
2. Choice of some 'critical tasks' to work on through the project including some in the IC pilot project
3. Definition of the linguistic (inter)cultural and (inter)disciplinary criteria in the assessment and feedback scheme (based on MAGICC grids?)
4. Delivery of four 'alignment' or 'harmonisation' workshops per year (i.e. one per block) at which content teachers compare their interpretations of real-life work of students
 - looking at both 'grading' and feedback

'ROAD-MAPPING' as FRAMEWORK for EMEMUS



Dafouz and
Smit (2014)
*Applied
Linguistics*

Intersecting dimensions complement each other

It is exactly these intersections that pay tribute to the inherent complexity of such varied contexts. Thus, these should not be sidelined but 'zoomed in on' and discussed in their intricacy."

Dafouz & Smit 2014: 15-16

Thank you for listening

**Any
Questions?**



Useful references and resources

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