

Writing with “Academic Style”: Theoretical considerations and preliminary findings on the new frontiers of EAP

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Received 20 April 2023; accepted after revisions 14 October 2023

ABSTRACT

EN Research in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has increased in terms of teaching and learning forms, methods and materials over the past decades. The globalisation of knowledge sharing and communication within the academic community, and the inclusion of marginalised higher education and research institutions have resulted in an ongoing evolution of many EAP-related terms. Nevertheless, underexplored areas of EAP research and practice remain, including that of “academic style”, a necessary integration of EAP and academic writing teaching and practice. The study presents a pilot study consisting in the detailed qualitative analysis of a collection of abstracts from a PhD seminar on academic style (self)proofreading. By employing a methodological framework combining stylistics, error analysis, and the categorisation of specific “areas of interest”, the pilot study highlights relevant stylistic errors in academic writing and draws conclusions on the requirements and implications of introducing academic style to EAP.

Key words: ACADEMIC STYLE PROOFREADING, ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES (EAP), STYLISTICS, ERROR ANALYSIS, ACADEMIC WRITING

ES La investigación en inglés con fines académicos (EAP por sus siglas en inglés) ha aumentado en cuanto a formas, métodos y materiales de enseñanza y aprendizaje en las últimas décadas. La globalización del intercambio de conocimientos y la comunicación dentro de la comunidad académica, así como la inclusión de instituciones de enseñanza superior e investigación marginadas, han dado lugar a una evolución continua de muchos términos relacionados con el EAP. Sin embargo, aún quedan áreas poco exploradas de la investigación y la práctica del EAP, incluida la del “estilo académico”, una integración necesaria del EAP y de la enseñanza y la práctica de la escritura académica. El estudio presenta un estudio piloto consistente en el análisis cualitativo detallado de una colección de resúmenes de un seminario de doctorado sobre (auto)corrección de estilo académico. Mediante el empleo de un marco metodológico que combina la estilística, el análisis de errores, el estudio piloto pone de relieve errores estilísticos relevantes de la escritura académica y extrae inclusiones sobre los requisitos y las implicaciones de la introducción del estilo académico de la EAP.

Palabras claves: CORRECCIÓN DE ESTILO ACADÉMICO, INGLÉS CON FINES ACADÉMICOS (EAP), ESTILÍSTICA, ANÁLISIS DE ERRORES, ESCRITURA ACADÉMICA

IT Negli ultimi decenni la ricerca sull'inglese per scopi accademici (EAP, sigla in inglese) si è estesa relativamente a forme, metodi e materiali di insegnamento e apprendimento. La globalizzazione della condivisione delle conoscenze e della comunicazione all'interno della comunità accademica, nonché l'inclusione di istituti di istruzione superiore e di ricerca marginati hanno portato a una continua evoluzione di molti termini relativi all'EAP. Tuttavia, esistono aree ancora poco esplorate della ricerca e della pratica EAP, tra cui quella dello “stile accademico”, quale necessaria integrazione dell'insegnamento e della pratica della scrittura EAP e accademica. Lo studio presenta una ricerca pilota che consiste nell'analisi qualitativa dettagliata di una raccolta di abstract di un seminario di dottorato sulla (auto)correzione dello stile accademico. Utilizzando un quadro metodologico che combina la stilistica, l'analisi degli errori e la categorizzazione di specifiche “aree di interesse”, lo studio evidenzia gli errori stilistici rilevanti nella scrittura accademica e trae conclusioni sui requisiti e le implicazioni dell'introduzione dello stile accademico nell'EAP.

Parole chiave: REVISIONE DELLO STILE ACCADEMICO, INGLESE PER SCOPI SPECIFICI (EAP), STILISTICA, ANALISI DEGLI ERRORI, SCRITTURA ACCADEMICA

1. Introduction: the ongoing evolution and revolution of EAP

The use of and research in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) have increased over the past decades in terms of teaching and learning forms, methods and materials. In fact, the globalisation of knowledge sharing and communication has resulted in the expansion of the academic community, which increasingly includes members of higher education and research institutions based in hitherto marginalised countries. This, in turn, has resulted in an extraordinary expansion of the users and uses of EAP, as well as an ongoing evolution of many commonly known and employed terms. These changes in categories and definitions are more specialised and inclusive, starting with EAP itself, which was conceived and remains one of the applicative paths of ESP (English for Specific Purposes). In fact, due to the multiplication of “academic Englishes” and their degree of specificity stemming from the development of highly specialised and/or hybrid academic fields of enquiry and research, the acronym EAP has branched out into EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes) and ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes). The former deals with the academic language that is necessary to communicate in all oral and written academic fields and shared genres (e.g. dissertation, abstract, conference, research paper, research grant). ESAP, on the other hand, is focused on the specialised genres that are common among students and academics conducting theoretical or applicative research and/or knowledge dissemination in a specific field (e.g. economics, medicine, science, engineering). As a result, ESAP courses are more likely to be based on the practical and realistic needs and materials of specific degree courses. Moreover, these branches of English often overlap, as students and specialists encounter both technical and academic genres of English, and it is often assumed that a solid basis of EGAP is preliminary to ESAP courses and skills. The growth of ESAP is thus aligned with ESPP (English for Scientific and Professional Purposes), which is the English variation of Languages for Specific and Professional Purposes, and typical of more applicative fields of research. As such, it is based on the learners’ real needs and on the collection and analysis of empirical material similar to that encountered in professional and academic contexts (Zanola, 2023).

Another fundamental (r)evolution in the international academic community is the ongoing spread of the use of the term “EAL (English as an Additional Language) writer/learner” (Holliday, 2005; Luo & Hyland, 2019) in place of the more traditional “English native speaker/non-native speaker” dichotomy that is still employed in materials and language learning/teaching discourse. This shift entails many subtle implications that have been questioned in light of today’s increasingly plurilingual academic discourse community, regardless of discipline or rank. First and foremost, while the term “non-native speaker” identifies the person based on an absence of linguistic competence comparable to that of a native speaker, the “additional” component of the EAL acronym underlines the enriched plurilingual competence that the academic draws on in expressing his or her lines of thought and research. This is especially important, as English is often not even the L2 or L3 of many academics. Flowerdew and Habibie even go to the extent of claiming that “EAL writers may be as equally proficient in English as their Anglophone counterparts, or even better” (2022, p. 18). Secondly, the term “non-native speaker” explicitly refers to only one skill (i.e. speaking) and, while its use has come to encompass written contexts, this seems to limit the competence of the learner. In contrast, the choice of “EAL writer/learner” brings the focus back to writing in the former case, which was the original aim of EAP and the most requested competence among EAL academics. This term further expands its scope to include all language skills in the latter case. Considering that the academic community now makes extensive use of multimodal and online means of communication and dissemination, it is fitting that the most populated category of users of English in academic contexts be referred to from a more comprehensive and evolutionary perspective.

One final but extremely significant ongoing form of development of EAP must be addressed before proceeding as it constitutes the ultimate aim of EGAP and ESAP courses and is the primary focus of the present paper and pilot study. It is the field of research of ERPP (English for Research Publication Purposes) (Englander & Cocoran, 2019; Flowerdew & Habibie, 2022) that dates back to 2008 (Cargill & Burgess) and starts from the premise that academic English is taking on an increasingly international and intercultural dimension as the *lingua franca* of research and dissemination. It is focused on the geopolitical and international relevance of knowledge exchange, and on the consequences of academic language review and evaluation for EAL academics.

Having provided a theoretical *excursus* into the current state of the art of EAP and its emerging subdivisions, the study will proceed to highlight a gap in EAP training and research that is affecting the scholarly success of EAL academics all over the world and impacting their careers and the international standing of their institutions. This gap consists in “academic style”, and has almost always been considered from the perspective of English L1 users (Hayot, 2014; Hopkins & Reid, 2018; Sword 2012; Tusting et al., 2019). In fact, many EAP manuals dedicate a section to “academic style” but this usually refers to instructions on the appropriate level

of formality and common sensical rules aimed at students (usually at an undergraduate level) whose first language is English, and are therefore linguistically competent, but lack knowledge and awareness of the underlying rules of etiquette of academic writing and communication within the academic discourse community. However, such definitions and teaching of “academic style” as a holistic shaping of academic writing deviates from another, and more specific, conception of “academic style”. Here, the second term is related to “stylistics” and the flow of phrases and sentences and their overall coherence, as viewed through the lens of linguistics and language pedagogy. This form of academic style and its intercultural and publication implications for academics whose L1 is not English will be explored in the next section. Following this, a brief but insightful pilot study applying previous research on academic style, and more precisely on “academic style (self)proofreading”, to conduct a two-part seminar for PhD students, is presented. The aim of the seminar was to make these students, who are at the ideal stage for learning and training their academic writing at all levels, aware of the relevance of academic style and teach them to recognise and “treat” it in their own writing and that of others. The term “treat” is used on purpose here as it is in error analysis instead of “correct” or “revise”, which are related to “mistakes”. It indicates an adjustment, or proposed adjustment, of a stylistic error that is not incorrect but rather unaligned with the academic community’s expectations. The findings of the second and more applicative part of the seminar are illustrated and analysed through stylistics (Burke, 2014; Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010; Simpson, 2004, 2014) and error analysis (Amiri & Puteh 2017; Corder, 1981; James, 1998;), and the paper concludes with reflections on broader implications of the study and on what can and should be done from this point on to better understand and integrate the dimension of academic style into EAP courses and training for various categories of users.

2. Background: academic style as the new dimension of EAP teaching and learning

The increasing importance of EAP higher education courses may be traced back to a number of factors: the adoption of English as a lingua franca on a global level; greater expectations and requirements of quality writing and publications (Belcher, 2007; Bennett, 2014; Bortolus, 2012); a more competitive academic job market founded on the almost century-old “publish or perish” precept (Coolidge, 1932); an overall exponentially greater volume of publications following a more rapid rate in terms of peer review, proofreading and copyediting, thanks to online document formats, platforms and language revision services.

The need for specialised EAP materials, teaching and courses has grown accordingly (Brown, 2000), but for the most part EGAP teaching continues to prevail due to limits in time and space, as well as economic and human resources. As a result, courses and workshops in academic writing are scarce, making them into intensive sessions in which “inculcated habits” (Hayot, 2014, p. 8) and homogenous and consolidated patterns are proposed instead of opportunities to train academic writing skills, which are elusive and subjective. Such a protocol has been fuelled by the conviction that university students only need “the basics” to learn the differences between general English and academic English, and that they would naturally acquire the language characterising their specific field of research through experience in writing for research and publishing, and reading the work of peers and experts. Such a line of reasoning finds support in the fact that the ability to write acceptably in specialised academic writing has traditionally been linked more to expertise and experience rather than original linguistic competence. Given the importance of publishing in English in international journals and volumes for career advancement, tenure and funding in various research fields, junior academics often face time constraints to develop expertise and improve their academic writing skills in English after completing their studies. Consequently, it becomes crucial for them to have already acquired such competence prior to entering the international academic discourse community. Therefore, like any other genre or form of writing, academic style should ideally be improved through consistent practice and feedback while studying.

Another concern arises from the limited opportunities for students to practice writing in their specific ESAP. In some countries, students may not engage in substantial writing until they are required to submit their dissertations or proposals such as abstracts, papers and research grants. At this stage, they are already expected to possess the ability to communicate effectively in academic English. This issue becomes even more pressing when considering that academic language is “no one’s mother tongue” (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p. 8), highlighting the fact that proficiency in academic writing is not solely dependent on language competence and not exclusive to native speakers. Moreover, in many countries, the only academic writing genres they practice are essays and final papers for courses, that constitute the sole basis, audience and grounds for evaluation (Hayot, 2014). These papers often deal with specific topics and course content (and therefore the knowledge of the field of study) and are thus evaluated based on ideas and argumentation rather than the language or style itself, as doing so would be seen as distracting and time consuming for the teachers and/or instructors who

have to correct the papers. However, this approach can be misleading compared to what junior academics will find when they officially enter the academic discourse community, as “style and language” (Kapp, Albertyne, & Frick, 2011) actually constitute the main reason why papers – especially those written by English L2 or L3 academics – are rejected in the course of the peer review process. This finding underlines the importance of being well versed not only in academic English and its genres on a lexical, grammatical, and syntactic level, which ensure the explicitly required and indisputable linguistic accuracy, but also in academic style to align one’s writing with the expectations of a varied international academic audience. The role of style is indeed complex, as the word “style” is used to refer to vague stylesheets and guidelines for authors that are aimed at English L1 and EAL writers alike to make their reading clearer for the readership, as has been observed in a study on the standards of journal submission guidelines and the examples it presents:

Authors are asked to make their manuscripts suitable for a *heterogeneous* readership — please use a clear *style* and avoid jargon’ [emphasis added]. Style was also used in place of benchmarks, such as requesting authors improve ‘the standard and style of their writing’ or adhere to the ‘journal style’. (McKinley & Rose 2018, p 8)

It is commonly assumed that linguistic competence automatically implicates stylistic competence yet, as previously pointed out, the latter is more subtle and usually not openly dealt with in the classroom. It is therefore necessary for EAP to be introduced and practiced in gradual and consistent stages, each of which provides more specific insight into the level of academic writing that is expected of them. After assessing the initial level of linguistic competence in General English and addressing any remaining problematic areas, EGAP should be introduced and exercised constantly and both in terms of content during non-language courses and of form through dedicated courses and training with feedback. Upon verifying that the students have gained competence in communicating in an academic context in general, this could then evolve into ESAP courses and training, which will accompany the students’ ongoing learning of specific terms and concepts. At this stage, the focus is on refining specialised content in accordance with students’ level of preparation of and attention to detail in writing, and therefore to their academic style, which is

a way of communicating in an academic setting where it is necessary to thoroughly communicate complex ideas in a manner that will make them clearly understandable and less likely to be challenged on the fundamental principles and purposes at their core (although these may be commented on or expanded) (Doerr, 2023, p. 93)

Academic style is therefore a discursive level that is essential in promoting clear, readable and appropriate linguistic and discursive patterns necessary for junior academics to clearly express their research ideas and findings. By adhering to the accepted academic style, their work becomes more acceptable within the international academic community. Awareness of academic style, the main intent of both the theoretical framework and pilot study of the present paper, is essential in enabling students and academics to identify and proofread their own work prior to submission, thereby reducing the possibility of receiving a “major revisions” or “reject” verdict on linguistic grounds.

A further noteworthy factor to consider in the teaching of academic style is the author’s need to reconcile two different “mindstyles”, i.e. common values, aspirations, and associations of thought, when writing for an international academic readership. Specifically, these consist in the author’s individual “mindstyle”, shaped by his or her personal reasoning and cultural background, and the collective “mindstyle” of the international academic community, which determines its communicative and discursive expectations (Kaplan, 1980; see also Clyne, 1993; Galtung, 1981). The increasing internationalisation of academic publication and knowledge sharing has drawn more attention to the academic’s language and style. As a result, many journals and publishing houses’ editors and reviewers now foster a lower threshold of tolerance of “unfamiliar”, and therefore “deficient”, language and style. Such an attitude, as studies in ERPP have underlined, carries important geopolitical and socio-economic implications as rejecting or delaying publications could have detrimental effects on the careers of academics and the chances for departments and universities in peripheral countries to secure funding, awards and crucial research collaborations (Flowerdew & Habibie, 2022). Often, these deviations from expected linguistic and stylistic patterns may be traced back to subtle and unconscious interferences of students’ and academics’ L1 and L2 (if their research field involves a language, literature or culture that is neither that of their first language nor English). These are therefore cases of clashes in “academic cultural mindstyles” that consist in a different form of academic writing that reflects the thought and discursive patterns characterising the academic language(s) the student or academic is more familiar with. Like any other

linguistic and discursive convention within a professional community these mindstyles are based on cohesion, uniformity and appropriateness to ensure that information and knowledge is properly conveyed and understood by its members. It is therefore important to enhance EAP and academic writing courses with attention towards the use, knowledge and cultural aspects of academic style. For this reason, it is advisable for academic writing classes – and even more for hypothetical workshops or courses on academic style – to undergo a brief reconnaissance on their unique circumstances and needs, as will be outlined through the pilot study that will follow. In this manner in fact, it will be possible to adjust the balance between theoretical and practical content, as well as the amount of individual and group proofreading, and the possibility and quantity of feedback and/or follow-up one-on-one sessions.

3. Pilot study: PhD seminar on “academic style (self)proofreading”

Building on the aforementioned considerations on academic style, a two-part seminar on “academic style (self)proofreading” constituted the basis for the present pilot study. The seminar was delivered for two days to a heterogeneous class of PhD students attending a doctorate course in linguistics, terminology and intercultural studies at a European university in January 2023.

3.1. Dataset

Before the seminar, the author requested the students to submit a brief abstract that they had either written and submitted or (preferably) intended to submit to a call for papers or an application to a doctoral programme, so as to analyse and treat any possible errors in academic style before the course. This was done to gain a better understanding of the students’ starting stylistic competence and detect any relevant or common errors to be brought to attention during the second, practice-based part of the seminar. Furthermore, since many of the abstracts were to be submitted, the students benefitted from receiving feedback on their writing and having the chance to treat their own work and that of others when providing feedback. The treatments were carried out by using the “tracking mode” and the treated abstracts were sent back to the students only after the seminar so as to allow them to engage in the activities without distractions or external influence. Actively working on the errors in class and then receiving detailed feedback as a follow-up consolidated the practice that had been carried out in class.

The first part of the seminar aimed to make the PhD students aware of the current need to hone their academic style and overall writing skills to effectively convey their research and reduce the chances of their work being questioned on linguistic grounds. The intent of the second part of the seminar was to assess the most common stylistic errors made by PhD students whose L2 or L3 is English, and their ability to recognise and treat errors in academic style.

All the students were conducting research in the humanities, a field whose academic style is more varied and less regulated than that of other fields. This leads to a less standardised form of academic style that may result in either greater acceptance of the scholars’ subjective academic style (especially in literary and cultural disciplines) or, on the contrary, an even greater expectation that the authors will possess and employ the “proper” English academic style (Doerr, 2023). The matter is even more confusing for junior academics when considering the previously mentioned vague style guidelines that are adopted by many international journals. Furthermore, because research in the humanities is considered less “urgent” compared to fields such as medicine, science and economics, where the “timeliness” of the findings must be safeguarded (Barroso et al., 2006; Vines et al., 2014; Welsh et al., 2018), scholars in the humanities may have to undergo longer peer review, editing and proofreading processes.

The seminar was attended by 16 PhD students, three of whom were in their first year of studies and therefore had not had the chance to attend the academic writing course that is offered by the doctoral programme during the second semester. These students submitted the abstract of their research project instead of that of a paper. The students were specialising in various disciplines, including English linguistics, English literature, English terminology, French linguistics, French literature, French lexicography, French terminology, Pedagogy and Sociology. The field of “linguistics” here refers to studies in Critical Discourse Analysis and similar approaches, which were kept separate from “lexicography” and “terminology” due to their more discursive academic style. In terms of research fields, the students could therefore be divided as indicated in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Students’ Field of Research

	Literature	Linguistics	Lexicography/Terminology	Sociology/Pedagogy
English	4 (2 first year)	1	1	0
French	1	3	3	0
Non-language	0	0	0	3 (1 first year)
Total	5	4	4	3

Such a variety in the disciplines illustrated in the table, despite them all pertaining to the field of humanities, leads to the expectation that there will be a difference in the type of common errors found in the abstracts. To the author’s knowledge, the extent or nature of such differences in academic style and related errors across disciplines has not been explored. This leads to the first two, closely related research questions:

RQ1: Does the scholar’s discipline influence the most common types of errors in academic style?

RQ2: Does the scholar’s use of English as the object of his/her research influence the most common type of errors in academic style?

In the second part of the seminar, to enable the students to test their ability to detect and treat errors in academic style, four “areas of interest” indicating the four most common categories of errors in academic style (presented in subsection 3.3.3 of the present paper) were introduced, followed by a series of significant examples of erroneous sentences and phrases for each area of interest. The samples were taken both from the submitted abstracts and from a corpus of research papers (with their abstracts) written by academics in the humanities that the author had previously proofread, gathered and used for previous research. The samples from the students’ abstracts and from the scholars’ papers were rendered anonymous and mixed before presenting them to the students. This was done to allow the students to remain detached from the texts so they could feel free to treat and comment on them, and to motivate them by proving that the writing of established academics presented the same stylistic errors as theirs. The students observed the samples and pointed out the stylistic errors, motivated their choices and then described the impact that the error had on them as potential readers, before showing how they would treat the error. At that point, the author showed them the treatment that had been performed and therefore confirmed the students’ proposal or integrated it if they had proposed other equally feasible solutions. Doing so underlined and validated the multiple manners in which one may improve one’s writing, and it gave the author the opportunity to point out differences between solutions and highlight particularly common “traps” and strategies.

After the seminar, the students received the treatment of their abstracts via e-mail, so as to become aware of their most common stylistic errors and the ways in which the teachings and strategies of the seminar could be applied to their own academic writing. This leads to the third and fourth research questions:

RQ3: What were the strengths and limits of the seminar?

RQ4: What are the broader implications of including academic style in academic writing courses for students and teachers?

The subsection that follows will present the aims and multifaceted methodological framework at the basis of the present study, along with the four “areas of interest” where most of the stylistic errors were made. Such errors, consisting of anonymised samples of errors from the students’ abstracts, will be treated and analysed in detailed to address *RQ1* and *RQ2* in the discussion of the results. Finally, the overall assessment of the seminar will be commented to answer *RQ3*, followed by final considerations on future research and practice on academic style in response to *RQ4*.

3.1. Aims and methodological framework

As previously mentioned, “academic style”, as it is intended in the present study, is different from that referred to in EAP manuals, and anchored in ERPP and academic language learning and teaching rather than in rules on appropriateness and formality. The study of style in linguistics however is complicated by the fact that style is a highly subjective and individual dimension of writing and self-expression, and that reviewers’

impressions and comments may be based on purely linguistic reasons and/or idiosyncratic preferences. The latter is demonstrated by the fact that even academics whose L1 is English may be asked to “revise the language and style” of their papers due to deviations from the reviewer’s expectations and preferences (who, paradoxically, may be an EAL user). For this reason, research in academic style proofreading aims at establishing and gradually reworking a framework that is as aligned as possible with the majority of what international journals and publishers would accept. In this manner it reconciles the “objective needs” of the academic community that are “based on facts and may be introduced from the outside” with the learner’s “subjective needs” that “involve the personal perspective of the learner as an individual” (Huhta, Vogt, Johnson, & Tulkki, 2013, p. 12). At the same time, it necessarily acknowledges that there will always be a slight margin of deviation constituted by the subjectivity of the author’s writing and that of the reviewer’s reading. Here, a “reviewer” is the person who is reviewing and checking the text in detail in view of its final publication, and therefore may include multiple figures such as peer reviewers, editors, and language professionals.

Therefore, it is necessary to gather data, resulting insight and feedback from experts in the fields of academic writing and its execution, teaching and assessing. The present study represents an attempt to build on previous research focused on research articles written by EAL academics (Doerr, 2023) and extend it by comparing it with the pilot study on abstracts written by EAL PhD students to verify whether the patterns in academic style and their errors are the same and therefore, through focused teaching and training during their doctoral studies, could be detected and untangled before the students officially start their research publishing activities. Due to the scope and design of the present study, a qualitative descriptive approach aiming at identifying, categorising, describing, and explaining the stylistic errors (Johnson & Christensen, 2000) will be carried out. An applicative and experiential perspective like that adopted in the present pilot study will require a combined methodological framework that considers and analyses both the object of interest, i.e. academic style (subsection 3.3.1) and the means through which it can be ‘treated’ rather than corrected, i.e. error analysis (subsection 3.3.2), by focusing on “areas of interest” that will be introduced in subsection 3.3.3.

3.3.1. Stylistics

The methodology of stylistics (Burke 2014; Simpson, 2004, 2014; Sorlin, 2014, 2018) is centred on the study of style, with which it is often confused. In fact, “style” is the unique manner in which one expresses oneself, while stylistics starts from the principle that “meaning in language comes about through the linguistic choices that a writer makes (either consciously or unconsciously)” (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010, p. 4). Stylistics originated in literature and rhetoric and officially became a field of study only in the context of 1960’s and 1970’s Russia Formalism. It thus formulated its theoretical and methodological approaches based on concepts such as “defamiliarization”, by which perception of the ordinary is enhanced by making the familiar seem unusual and “foregrounding”, when the perceived norms of language are eluded through “parallelism” or “deviation” (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010). Studying style therefore entails observing the patterns underlying what is considered “appropriate” and detecting any formal or functional deviations from such norms (McIntyre & Walker, 2019). Stylistics was then followed by a more contextualised phase and is well suited for exploring expressions of individuality and their underlying functions in relation to the specific and surrounding context. In fact, it “helps us to understand how texts are received and how readers and listeners react to those texts” (Solly, 2016, p. 5) and therefore uses the preliminary empirical data it yields to understand an academic’s idiosyncratic mind style in academic writing and how it can be translated and aligned with the collective mind style. In doing so

a stylistics-oriented approach can provide the necessary scaffolding to facilitate the individual progression of learners and new participants of professional communities toward discursive competence, and it can also be a useful way for members of professional communities to explore new modes of communication in their professional domains. (Solly, 2016, p. 19)

Such translation and alignment is precisely what academics seek upon in order for their research and ideas to be published, and therefore acknowledged and accepted. From a broader perspective, stylistics is therefore connected to “concepts of context, identity and belonging, as well as to notions of appropriateness and accuracy” (Solly, 2016, p. 3).

Stylistics is also characterised by its eclectic and adaptable nature, and the fact that it is interdisciplinary and unruly (Simpson, 2004) has led both to numerous internal subfields and evolutions and to collaborative research approaches and methodological frameworks. In fact, it has been pointed out that

what makes stylistics specific as opposed to disciplinary linguistics is its refusal to define its tools a priori. The resort to particular linguistic tools and theories depends on the nature of the text under study and the questions that the researcher wants her research to answer. (Sorlin, 2014)

Accordingly, the present study will follow this trend by employing a multifaceted methodology uniting stylistics, error analysis and a categorisation of specific areas of interest to be applied to the materials and input of the seminar in order to perform a qualitative analysis and gain better understanding of the current standings of EAP.

3.3.2. Error analysis

The need for data and the observational, rather than evaluative, perspective that is needed to study academic style led to the methodology of error analysis (Allen & Corder, 1974; Canagarajah, 2015; Corder, 1981), a branch of applied linguistics focusing on “the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language” (James, 1998, p. 1). It also makes a point of distinguishing between the performance of English L1 users and EALs:

Error analysis is a method used to document the errors that appear in learner language, determine whether those errors are systematic, and (if possible) explain what caused them. Native speakers of the target language (TL) who listen to the learner language probably find learners’ errors very noticeable. [...] While native speakers make unsystematic ‘performance’ errors (like slips of the tongue) from time to time, second language learners make more errors, and often ones that no native speaker ever makes. An error analysis should focus on errors that are systematic violations of patterns in the input to which the learners have been exposed. Such errors tell us something about the learner’s interlanguage, or underlying knowledge of the rules of the language being learned (Corder, 1981, p. 10).

While stylistics focuses on finding and detailing peculiarities in styles, error analysis uses diverging language choices to trace back to the reasoning behind them. This, in turn, is useful in devising ways to make learners aware of and therefore avoid such errors. For this reason, error analysis has been employed to observe and improve students’ academic writing, but the focus of these studies is usually on grammar, and therefore concerns “mistakes” more than “errors”, as opposed to the present research. The word “error”, instead of “mistake”, will be adopted, where the term “error” refers to

the use of a linguistic item (e.g. a word, a grammatical item, a speech act, etc.) in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning. A distinction is sometimes made between an error, which results from incomplete knowledge, and a mistake made by a learner when writing or speaking and which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some other aspect of performance. [...] In the study of second and foreign language learning, errors have been studied to discover the processes learners make use of in learning and using a language. (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 201)

While mistakes are indisputable and can be understood and corrected when pointed out, errors in style do not affect the grammaticality and correctness of the text, but rather its readability and ability to be clearly understood and appreciated by the academic discourse community. This is why observations by reviewers on “mistakes” are clear, while those on “errors” not so much, as the proper style that would be most suited to avoiding them has not been explicitly taught to students. Moreover, the reviewers themselves may not be able to clearly motivate the reason for their observation, either because they are also EALs or because they are English L1 users without any experience in linguistics or stylistics. This is because “the native speaker of English of course has a great deal of intuitive knowledge about linguistic appropriateness and correctness [...] which he has amassed over the years” (Crystal & Davy, 1969, p. 5). For this reason, the focus here will not be on “correction” but rather the description, explanation and “treatment” of interlingual errors (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 201-202) based on transfer.

Accordingly, the pilot study followed the stages of the “error analysis” procedure:

- Collection of a sample of learner language;
- Identification of errors;

- Description of errors;
- Explanation of errors;
- Evaluation of errors. (Allen & Corder, 1974)

The novelty of the area of academic style and its categorisation and treatment are in line with the trial-and-error approach that has been hitherto necessary to improve academic writing, and therefore academic style. This is the manner in which past experts have managed to reach their level of linguistic and stylistic competence but, by detecting, shedding light on and treating errors, it is also that in which current research on stylistics may create and improve a framework of categories of error to be built on and improved.

3.3.3. Areas of interest

The intent of the qualitative investigation of the present study is to verify the feasibility and potential of integrating academic style into PhD students' EAP and academic writing training and to identify, categorise, describe and explain the most common stylistic errors. This was done by considering the genre of abstracts where English is an L2 or even an L3. In order to better collect and observe the errors, the following "areas of interest", or general categories of stylistic errors, were considered:

- necessity to add information that is obvious to the non-native author but not to the reader (henceforth referred to as 'addition of extra text');
- deletion of redundant information and forms that represent instances of language transfer from the non-native author's L1 (henceforth referred to as 'deletion of redundant text');
- shifting and repositioning of clauses and phrases in line with the audience's expectations (henceforth referred to as 'shifting and repositioning');
- misuse in appropriateness and register (henceforth referred to as 'appropriateness and register') (Doerr, 2023,p. 146).

The analysis of the collected material will be divided by area of interest and commented in detail by considering the overall number and those made by the English, French and Non-language groups. Similar errors will be grouped and explained, and the relevance of the area of interest for future courses will be assessed.

4. Analysis and discussion

Upon collecting and treating the 16 abstracts that had been submitted before the course, the errors may be divided based on the area of interest and on the group of PhD students ("English", "French", "Non-language"). The number of students of each group that committed the errors was also counted, so as to understand if it was an individual or collective issue. Table 2 below illustrates the results of such a division:

Table 2

Number of stylistic errors per group (number of errors/number of students who committed the errors)

	Addition	Deletion	Shifting	Appropriateness
English group (6 students)	6/3	5/3	7/4	2/2
French group (7 students)	4/4	8/5	14/4	2/2
Non-language (3 students)	0/0	6/3	3/2	1/1
Total (16 students)	10/7	19/11	24/10	5/5

The data in the table demonstrate that "deletion of extra text" and "shifting and repositioning" were the two most common stylistic errors, both in general and in the number of students who made them. This is also significant because these areas are usually not extensively explored in traditional EAP courses and students do not have the opportunity to test these skills because EAP materials tend to target a standardised international audience. As a result, they will certainly have to constitute the first and most practiced areas of study and practice in the future with the assistance of teachers and instructors who have experience with both languages and their possible transfers.

4.1. Addition of extra text

Interestingly, among the four categories of stylistic errors, the "addition of extra text" error (10 errors in total, 4 for the "French" group and 6 for the "English" group) requiring the insertion of words (the underlined words in the examples) to 'fill in blanks' that are perceived in reading as both the 'easiest' and the 'hardest' to detect. Since these blanks were to be filled by small, functional words, such as prepositions and connecting words/expressions that are typical of academic English, this error was considered the easiest to treat for students who were used to adjusting sentences according to traditional English grammar rules. At the same time, their omissions were not perceived by the students as they would be by potential reviewers and readers, especially if present in multiple instances. While this may be due in part to the fact that the texts consisted in abstracts, which were therefore subjected to word limits, it is also found in research articles to reduce the number of words and supposedly 'lighten' the load on the sentence. Such is the case of the first three examples below:

- 1) enable the use of a language that is more inclusive [...] by avoiding the "generic" or "neutral" masculine (#7)
- 2) thus underlining the effects (#13)
- 3) a corpus through which X's language [...], as well as the use and distribution of collocates and metaphors (#3)

Examples 4) and 5) present a more serious form of errors needing the addition of extra text compared to the previous three. In fact, in these cases the use of a comma to divide the two phrases is understandable in the students' L1 because it can be inferred by the rest of the sentence. In English however the second phrase may indicate either the result of the fulfilment of the first phrase (with "thus", similarly to "therefore"), or the manner in which the circumstances of the first phrase take place (with "by"). Here the lack of a word may render the sentence ambiguous:

- 4) the dangerous X that puts humans in a subaltern position, thus/by carrying out a process of (#2)
- 5) at last annihilates itself, thus/by disappearing (#5)

The final three examples of this section share the treatment of the error by adding a relative clause. These represent situations in which the sentences were not ambiguous *per se* and could be acceptable, especially in the case of 6), where the omission of "which is" is compensated by its substitution with a comma. They are therefore true cases of "errors", and not mistakes, that are detected on a subtle level and were treated simply to better 'flesh out' the rhythm of the overall sentence.

- 6) X's social media presence, which is showcased through a website (#3)
- 7) appearance of multiple variants and paraphrases that are likely to prove (#11)
- 8) one of the X problems that were encountered (#12)

This category of error was most common among the students in English-related disciplines, not out of lack of linguistic competence, but because the students presupposed that the reader would be able to insert the additional information. When presented too frequently however, excessive elisions make the text hard to understand.

4.2. Deletion of redundant text

The opposite error to the lack of text, i.e. instances that required the "deletion of redundant text", occurred more frequently, with 19 total errors within the collection of abstracts (5 for the "English" group, 8 for the "French" group and 6 for the "Non-language" group). These errors (whose treatment is indicated by the strikethroughs in the samples) could be divided into three large groups, starting with the one that accounted for 11 cases, i.e. the deletion of redundant determined article "the". Only a few of these samples are proposed here but in general they may be traced back to two reasons: the desire to completely structure a formal sentence to the extent of a 'hyperinsertion' as in example 9), or an interference of the student's L1 (and L2 in the case of the students of the "French" group), as in 10), 11), and 12). These are significant exemplifications of

the concept of “errors”, as this redundance does not prevent the comprehension of the text, although it can unnecessarily lengthen or weigh the text down or frustrate the reader, especially when present in multiple and repeated instances:

- 9) the advent, the boom and the appropriation of social media, (#1)
- 10) It sounds the alarms of the potential X (#2)
- 11) the corpus shows how the X speeches on ecological and energy transitions (#11)
- 12) the research resorts to one of ~~the~~ corpus linguistics’ tools (#12)

The second series of examples is more evident to a reviewer or reader and consists of semantic redundancies, where there is a noun + noun or a verb + verb structure next to one another within a phrase. Such expressions are also common in the students’ L1 and L2 (in the case of the “French” group), and at a first glance would simply appear to be a consequence of interlinguistic interference, as in examples 13) and 14), where the deleted segments take on a very ‘formulaic’ form.

- 13) a reflection on the importance of the role of X athletes (#8)
- 14) reflect on the centrality of the body in the conception of A [novel] and B [novel] by X (#5)

However, given the position of the two parts, it is also reasonable to believe that some of these stylistic errors were a result of the student’s intent to enforce or better frame the presentation of something that was considered important. Examples 15), 16), and 17) therefore could be considered “communication-based errors [...] resulting from strategies of communication” (Richards & Schmidt 2010, p. 201–2), and therefore an attempt to emphasise the message and make it more formal at the same time:

- 15) we will try to understand how the social media "X" impacts language usage (#1)
- 16) that are able to duplicate and replace humans (#2)
- 17) The guidelines of X on A and B [issues], for example, aim to seek neutral and inclusive solutions (#7)

The final example 18) of “deletion of redundant text” may be positioned on the threshold between an error and a mistake, in that the “ends up” cannot be used with “in” but its use is precisely aimed at maintaining the ‘flow’ of the sentence and therefore the quality of the academic style of the writing. It seems to be a moment of indecision between “end up + verb-ing” and “end in noun” that was mixed but seems to be a “developmental error reflecting natural stages of development” (Richards & Schmidt 2010, p. 201– 2). This indicates that academic style is a level of grammar that may grow instinctively with practice in reading and writing but that it must be directly addressed in order to prevent it from becoming a dismissed mistake instead of a promising error.

- 18) a [...] creature – ends up in personifying both X and Y (#4)

This area was particularly important, in that it was equally distributed among the three groups of students for different reasons: the “English” group made the more ‘creative’ errors and hinted at an aspiration to use more refined English; the “French” group understandably were influenced by the interference of their L1 and L2, while the “Non-language” group made errors consisting of the redundant use of ‘filler’ words that recalls that of their L1 and is also probably motivated by their lack of practice compared to the other two groups. This area is particularly important, in that it has a strong “defamiliarising” effect, making its errors easily detected by reviewers and readers, just as they were easy for the students to detect during the second part of the seminar.

4.3. Shifting and repositioning

This was the area of interest that resulted in the greatest number of errors that were evenly divided among groups and students (24 total, of which 7 in the “English” group, 14 in the “French” group, and 3 in the “Non-language” group), which demonstrates that it is a common issue that therefore should certainly be tackled in any future research or course in academic style and academic writing in general. When analysing errors in “shifting and repositioning” however, there were common trends within the category that were based on

different reasons and had to be treated differently. The first group of these, which may be seen in examples 19) (where the past participle "created" used as an adjective unites it with its related noun "corpus"), 20) (with the deletion of a distracting phrase between dashes), and 21) (where the pre-positioning of "X" follows the internationally recognised expectation of the airport's nominal reference) involve the pre-positioning of clauses and words (past participle verbs and even a name in example 21) before a noun. By doing so they are converted into adjectives that are integrated into the noun phrase of the noun that they now more clearly and closely define and compact the flow of the sentence instead of interrupting it.

- 19) the created corpus created makes it possible (#11)
- 20) with regard to the explicit or implicit links – explicit or implicit – that they entertain (#13)
- 21) the X international airport of [city] X (#15)

The second group of repositionings consists, on the contrary, in post-positioning information introduced in contained clauses so as to not separate the verb of the sentence from the object(s) to which it refers. This is another example of a "communication-based error" because the students had intentionally structured the sentence in this manner so as to ensure that the verb would be directly accompanied by extra information that refers to it. This reasoning is a hypercorrection and a strategic choice at the same time, but it proves that the students are unaware of the detachment that it creates in the SVO syntactic structure, one that should be maintained even at the expense of distancing extra details and repositioning them towards the end, where they remain isolated.

- 22) signifiers that call ~~to mind~~ peculiar X dichotomies to mind (#2)
- 23) revival that involved ~~almost entirely~~ poetry production almost entirely (#4)
- 24) in order to note, ~~in a diachronic perspective~~, the changes that have occurred over the centuries in a diachronic perspective. (#13)

The shifting treatment may also even concern academic phrases and more extensive parts of the sentence from the middle of the sentence to the beginning, like in 25), or to the end like in 26) and 27). This not only has stylistic implications but it also re-establishes the repositioned clauses as 'signpost language', thus enabling them to enhance the sentence rather than to distract.

- 25) It is my contention that the way that X bridges classical and contemporary elements, ~~it is my contention~~, provides new insights (#9)
- 26) ~~Focusing on issues of X, Y and Z~~, this paper analyses the importance of language as a tool to negotiate one's identity and relationship with the self and the world by focusing on issues of X, Y, and Z. (#3)
- 27) We will proceed with the manual extraction ~~from X~~ of some headwords referring to the lexical units mentioned above from X (#10)

The variety of this area of interest also resulted in the great variety of treatments that were proposed by the students during the seminar. This type of error decisively affects the readability of the text and is influenced by the students' perception of the mobility of these parts of the sentence, which is greater in their L1 than in English and in the L2 of the students of the "French" group. Such perception should therefore be taken into consideration and practiced in courses on academic writing within the class and considering the background of the students, which is something that EAP materials cannot and do not take into account.

4.4. Appropriateness and register

The concept of "appropriateness", as seen when exploring the methodology of stylistics, is the word that is most frequently associated with style in general, and with academic style, including that of academics whose L1 is English. Nevertheless, errors in appropriateness and register were the least common in the abstracts, with only 5 occurrences that were equally distributed among the groups. This denoted students' awareness of this dimension regardless of their discipline of choice and regular exposure to informal academic language and style.

- 28) In addition ~~to that~~, the French language (#1)

- 29) ~~In this connection, t~~The proposed paper focuses on X's novel (#4)
 30) ~~Our work will be developed in this way,~~ After presenting the macrostructure and microstructure of the dictionary, we our work will focus on the management and ordering of the various lemmas. (#10)
 31) ~~From In~~ a geopolitical key perspective (#15)
 32) These results can be further explained ~~because of~~ in light of interdiscursivity (#16)

These examples are interestingly all connected with academic phraseology, which is expected to be passively learnt, and even memorised, and then seamlessly inserted into the text. This is also proof of the students' acquired competence in topics that are commonly covered in academic writing courses and therefore their need to proceed to the next level and improve in academic style before being officially introduced to the academic discourse community.

5. Final considerations

The aim of the present study was to explore a gap in EAP and academic writing courses, i.e. academic style, and demonstrate the importance of introducing it to students rather than expecting them to passively learn it through trial and error. In order to do so, the initial theoretical considerations were followed by a pilot study conducted at a European PhD degree course and in a class of 16 PhD students. The analysed abstracts were submitted by the students and treated by the author before the seminar which included the students' active participation in order to (self)proofread texts and treat errors in academic style. The treatments of the submitted abstracts have yielded some interesting points worth exploring in future research, starting with the first and second research questions:

RQ1: Does the scholar's discipline influence the most common types of errors in academic style?

RQ2: Does the scholar's use of English as the object of his/her research influence the most common type of errors in academic style?

Although the students were working in different fields in the humanities, there were a series of interdisciplinary intersections that prove that, while academic style may change greatly based on research areas (e.g. law, economics, medicine, the humanities), it exhibits more common traits in relation to linguistic competence rather than the proximity of their disciplines. The fact that the students used English, as opposed to French or other languages, as an L2 greatly contributed to the type of error in academic style. In fact, the students specialising in French literature, linguistics or terminology/lexicography made more stylistic errors in syntax, especially in the area of "shifting", thus interrupting the 'flow' of the sentence. This reflects the greater flexibility of French, and neo-Latin languages in general, when constructing sentences and determining the order of presented information. The intent was to pre-position pieces of information that were considered more interesting, important, or related to the previous phrase of the sentence, but its translation into English becomes quite difficult and frustrating to read. Indeed, this was the case of examples 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, which all were from the "French" and "Non-language" groups and therefore did not consider English their object of study but rather merely a vehicular language. Another common error based on discipline was found in the abstracts of students of the "Non-language" group: in these texts, which tended to be the shortest, there were compound errors within the same sentence. This demonstrates the students' almost exclusive use of their L1 in academic contexts, and therefore their limited use of academic English compared to their colleagues specialising in language studies. This may be demonstrated in examples 33) and 34) below:

- 33) This contribution ~~was born~~ stems from the need to analyze ~~the~~ emissions deriving from noises caused by ~~the~~ airports, in particular the X [name] international airport of Y [city] ~~X~~, thus underlining the effects ~~that of~~ noises on ~~cause~~ over ~~the~~ neighboring ~~countries~~ towns and cities. (#15)
 34) From a methodological point of view, a ~~mixed approach will be used~~ (mixed method approach), which is necessary to integrate X coming from A and from B and C realities, will be used/implemented. (#8)

These differences in overall disciplines and similarities in language use and style provide stimulating starting points for future research and teaching: the first one lies in the potential knowledge exchange that

could take place in heterogeneous small classes of EAL students who, by treating and discussing errors together, may help one another while practicing their skills as writers and as reviewers and proofreaders. The second point is that knowing common areas of errors based on disciplines could help teachers and instructors plan more useful lessons and exercises and have a better idea of their needs. With time and experience, this could lead to the preparation of materials to be used and adapted to ESAP writing courses. The ideal teacher is one with knowledge of and experience in the students’ L1 (and therefore its “cultural mindstyle”) as well as English academic writing and proofreading/reviewing, but the collaboration between two or more instructors with these skills (e.g. an expert in academic writing and a language professional with experience in proofreading academic texts) could create an ideal setting for improving EAP courses and giving EAL students a better idea of what to expect when they approach the academic discourse community. In conclusion, addressing the following question:

RQ3: What were the strengths and limits of the seminar?

The two-part seminar demonstrated the perceived importance of academic style and its proofreading, as well as the presence of areas of interest that are more in need of attention, i.e. “deletion of extra text” and “shifting and repositioning”. It also was encouraging in showing that many of the students’ errors were developmental and communication-based, and therefore proof of attempted creative use of language rather than lack of competence. Further studies need to be carried out to confirm this and to verify whether different departments or research fields may yield different results.

As far as limits are concerned, the seminar focused on abstracts due to time constraints but future research and the observation of longer texts would certainly be useful in detecting further areas of interest and comparisons among classes. Longer workshops and seminars would allow the study of longer texts, which could yield materials and insight on further areas of interest. Courses would also benefit from one-to-one follow-up sessions. As regards the final research question:

RQ4: What are the broader implications of including academic style in academic writing courses for students and teachers?

The present study has proven that awareness of and practice in academic style is important in improving academic writing. In fact it ensures that the “language and style” (Kapp, Albertyne, & Frick, 2011) of the paper is in line with the knowledge and communicative needs of the international academic discourse community the junior and EAL academics are approaching and entrusting their work to, since “one of the keys to understanding how an organisation works is to understand its systems of communication” (Huhta, Vogt, Johnson & Tulkki, 2013, p. 5). This can be applied both to EGAP and ESAP, as well as to individual academics and multicultural higher education learning contexts. As the present study has demonstrated, the errors and necessary treatments that may be found when focusing on academic style (self)proofreading change according to the learner’s ESAP and the perceived and real needs of the discipline, as well as other possible constraining factors (e.g. number of authors and word limit, terminological and discursive requirements of the discipline, presence and use of other academic genres). The peculiarities that are found through the observation and treatment of academic texts produced within the field at hand should be recorded, categorised and integrated into EAP and academic writing courses so as to train students and junior academics to write and gain insight on a manner that is appropriate for their specialised audience. The presented material and related feedback resulting from such courses could, in turn, become data to be gathered into corpora and analysed both qualitatively and – in time – quantitatively. While this is simpler when studying mistakes in vocabulary, grammar, syntax and texts that undermine the communicative power – if not even the ability to understand the text – it is much more difficult for learners to detect errors in style. This is because they have not been explored in previous studies and exercises, so it may be hard to see through the learner’s “academic cultural mindstyle” filter that they are not even aware of. This is where the assistance and competence of instructors and teachers come into play and may stem from various types of experience: teaching and correcting/treating others’ work, writing and reviewing their own academic papers, and proofreading, copyediting and revising the writing of others. These three forms of experience, which may be united in one person or shared among multiple professionals who assist and support one another through their exchange in knowledge, endow them with particular sensitivity towards stylistically appropriate writing and “insider knowledge” that are often more important than sole competence as a L1 English speaker and user.

In conclusion, constant research on and improvement of the errors in academic style among students and academics from different disciplinary, cultural and linguistic backgrounds would enable the expansion and customisation of EAP courses and specialised seminars based on the needs of the class and individuals. Moreover, they would greatly benefit from the linguistic/stylistic competence of teachers and instructors whose experience in reading, correcting and treating provide effective support for students, regardless of their L1. A third and final category whose experience and collaboration would be invaluable in understanding the process of “academic style proofreading” is that of language professionals and reviewers actively engaged in the academic editorial community. They could present the perspective of the receiver of the submitted text and enable students to understand the “academic mindstyle” and accepted academic style of the international academic community of their discipline of choice from an internal perspective. The combination of the competences, research and insight of academics, EAP teachers and instructors and professionals from the academic editorial industry would present the most complete and experiential approach to learning academic writing, and academic style in general. This is especially crucial in the current academic context, where the standards of academic writing have been noticeably raised and academics are increasingly pressed to disseminate and share innovative and impactful ideas and knowledge.

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