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Research blogs, wikis, and tweets

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RESEARCH BLOGS, WIKIS, AND TWEETS

Maria Kuteeva

Introduction

At the turn of the millennium, the internet was perceived as something to be used with caution, ‘a resource that is a mix of standards and near anarchy’ (Slaouti, 2002, p.107). The first generation of the web did not allow for much interaction, and any online content needed to be checked for errors before publication, particularly in academic settings. Over the past decade, control over the publishing domain has been irreversibly lost with the emergence of the so-called Web 2.0 (O’Reilly, 2005), which empowers the user to take an active role in the creation of content through social networking, blogs, wikis, YouTube, and Twitter. The development of digital technologies has resulted in the emergence of new academic genres and discourses, and the impact of these developments on English for academic purposes (EAP) needs to be explored.

This chapter provides a new angle in EAP research by discussing how blogs, wikis, and tweets are used by researchers worldwide, reviewing recent literature in the field, and providing suggestions for pedagogical applications. So far, EAP and English for specific purposes (ESP) research has focussed primarily on traditional research genres, as several chapters in this handbook testify. At the same time, as Barton and Lee (2013, p.2) point out, ‘academic writing has been reshaped in many ways with the rise of new technologies’. Today’s world is increasingly mediated through new types of text and, by combining semiotic resources in new ways, people create new relations between language and other ways of meaning making. Contrary to predictions of the internet becoming dominated by English made in the 1990s (e.g. Fishman, 1998, p.26), the internet and its users are increasingly multilingual. The multilingual encounters online contribute to shifting the relations between languages, and vernacular language practices are circulated more widely. At the same time, there is more tolerance towards non-standard language uses, and English is often used as a lingua franca in online contexts (Mauranen, 2013). Thus, language has become central to new forms of knowledge creation and self-representation online: there is more reading and, in particular, more writing taking place, as well as more tolerance towards language varieties and non-standard uses (Barton & Lee, 2013, p.183).

Applied linguistics research into academic discourse online is relatively new, and the fast developments in information technologies pose continuous challenges to researchers. For example, when Myers began studying the discourse of blogs in 2006, he was concerned about the short-lived nature of his findings:
By the time you read this, blogs may be over, replaced by various sub-genres and other ways of networking. And *Wikipedia* may be going downhill (though people have been saying it was going downhill since the very beginning, and it shows no signs of going away). We will still need to analyze whatever genres emerge, using some concepts linking the forms and the uses to which they are put.

*(Myers, 2010, p.26)*

By now, blogs, wikis, and more recently Twitter have become established media of communication in the research world. By analogy with Web 2.0, the Science 2.0 movement (www.science20.com) emerged, referring to ‘new practices of scientists who post raw experimental results, nascent theories, claims of discovery and draft papers on the Web for others to see and comment on’ (Waldrop, 2008). At the same time, Waldrop claims, in some disciplines such as biomedicine, there is still a strong reluctance to open up because of high competition. The authorship and credit problems remain major obstacles in disseminating research online. The traditional publication, most often in the form of the research article (see Samraj, this volume; Belcher, Barron Serrano and Yang, this volume), holds the most prestige in the academic world. Nevertheless, digital communication and social media hold a great potential to democratise science and to open it up to lay audiences. Thus, making use of blogs, wikis, and other social media in our EAP courses can play an important role in helping non-English-speaking researchers worldwide to become full members of their respective research communities.

### Research blogs, wikis, and tweets

Science blogs have become an established channel of communication, both between scientists and with the general public. Many of the science blogs are written by journalists and belong to traditional publishers (e.g. SciTech Connect by Elsevier, the science blog network by *The Guardian*, Scientific American blog network). In the context of this article, however, the science blog is narrowed down to the research blog kept by active researchers. Luzón (2011, p.518) describes the research blog as ‘an online genre that enables self-presentation and usually incorporates social tools which support participation and conversation’. Thus, research blogs enable scientists to engage with their academic and other communities, present and discuss their work in progress, and receive feedback from their peers. Access to research blogs is not limited to a specific discourse community: both scholarly audience and the general public can read these blogs and contribute to discussions.

A wiki has been defined as a ‘freely expandable collection of interlinked web pages, a hypertext system for storing and modifying information – a database, where each page is easily edited by any user with a forms-capable Web browser client’ (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001, p.14). Its basic features include creating and editing texts, linking different pages through hyperlinks, inserting images and links to other sites, tracking changes and comparing different versions of the text, a history page, and a discussion page. Wikis can be used for collectively producing, organising and sustaining textual, visual, and auditory resources, and have been used in academic and EAP contexts (e.g Kuteeva, 2011; Lund, 2008).

Applied linguistics research on the use of Twitter in the research world is still in its infancy. Myers (2013) has demonstrated that scientists on Twitter appear to be ‘an odd community’, different from others in personal narrative and stance (e.g. using many more links and citations). He further argues that tweets by scientists do not all fall into the same
generic category, as different research communities use Twitter for different purposes. Drawing on Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), Myers argues that communicating about science on Twitter reveals the ‘contingent repertoire’ which is used among scientists to talk about their work in informal settings. Scientists’ tweets provide an insight into day-to-day practices and problems, and show what is going on ‘behind the scenes’ in the research world. This kind of communication is different from the ‘empiricist repertoire’ (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984), which is used in academic publications, popularisations, and in other formal settings where scientists are required to report on their research.

Blogs and wikis have been studied from different perspectives, both in applied linguistics and in other related fields. For example, the discourse of science blogs, and research blogs in particular, has been analysed by Luzón (e.g. 2011, 2013a, and 2013b), Mauranen (2013), Miller and Shepherd (2009), and Myers (2010). Most applied linguistics research on blogs has focussed on the discourse features of blog posts and discussion threads. As will be shown in the following section, Luzón’s studies, for example, have examined interactional discourse features on research blogs and how scientific knowledge is being repackaged to address different audiences. The discourse of wikis has received less attention in applied linguistics; see, for example, two chapters in Myers (2010) on ‘history’ and ‘talk’ pages in Wikipedia. Some studies have focussed on the pedagogical applications of blogs and wikis (e.g. Hewings, 2013; Lund, 2008; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010), including EAP contexts (e.g. Kuteeva, 2011). Several forthcoming publications, such as Myers on the use of Twitter by scientists, Mauranen on reflexivity in science blogging, and McGrath on the collaborative writing of a research article on a maths blog, will add further insights into the study of online academic discourse. For example, drawing on the analysis of over 600 thread comments posted by maths blog participants, McGrath (under review) shows what aspects of research-based writing are important, and how decisions concerning genre and knowledge dissemination are reached. Her findings offer additional insights into the process of research article construction in pure mathematics. The following section will outline some of the critical issues raised in applied linguistics research.

Critical issues in research

Science blogs have been classified in different ways, based on content (e.g. Blood, 2000; Krishnamurthy, 2002; Herring et al., 2005), based on linguistic features such as register (Grieve et al., 2011), and based on typified social action (Miller & Shepherd, 2004). Research blogs are interesting for an applied linguist and EAP researcher for several reasons. These blogs provide data for exploring the effects of the medium on writing and its limitations, possess specific register features (mixing written and spoken), and develop specific multimodal discourse features. Bloggers tend to engage in interaction with the public by resorting to the ‘contingent repertoire’ of scientific discourse (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984), including personal expressions of opinion, feelings, and emotional reactions. This combination of features distinguishes research blogging from other types of scientific discourse (Luzón, 2013a). In addition, blogs often mix languages and make use of English as a lingua franca, since many researchers are not using their first language when they write on the blog (Mauranen, 2013).

One controversial issue in the study of research blogs is whether they can be seen as a genre. Myers (2013) confesses that when writing his book on the discourse of blogs and wikis (Myers, 2010), he realised that blogs were not genres at all, comparing the blogosphere to the so-called ‘inkosphere’ of traditional publication. Similarly, Barton and Lee (2013, p. 29) argue that blogs provide space and structure for communication and developing different
genres depending on who is writing and what. Mauranen (2013) discusses the blog as ‘a cluster of genres’ and argues that research blogging is ‘neither academic nor popular’.

Some applied linguistics researchers (e.g. Biber & Conrad, 2009) connect genre to register variation. Due to its specific register features, Mauranen (forthcoming) views the science blog as a genre, a ‘basic level’ category (Lakoff, 1987), and the research blog as its sub-genre. She further argues that the initial blog posts tend to be written more carefully and focus on a particular topic, while the discussion thread appears to be more spontaneous and may contain both informal and relatively formal contributions. Thus, blog discourse is rather hybrid and incorporates features from spoken and written registers (Grieve et al., 2011). For example, the excerpt below illustrates how research bloggers mix written and spoken registers, empiricist and contingent repertoires (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984), and refer to Wikipedia in their discussion of scientific matters:

[ … ] Do we need to also consider contaminants that might have banded at a specific density in the gradient? The centrifugation is powerful enough to cause the heavy Cs+ ions to move down in the tube, might it also affect the distribution of other ions? What does Wikipedia say? (Ah, the correct term is ‘isopycnic centrifugation’.) Nothing about other ions. CsCl gradients have typically been used to separate DNAs with different base compositions from each other (e.g. nuclear DNA from mitochondrial or plastid DNA); I don’t know if anyone ever used them to separate DNA from soluble contaminants. Bottom line: If the LC-MS data shows arsenic in the DNA, we can polish up these DNA purification steps. If it doesn’t, we won’t need to bother.

(RRR blog; cited in Mauranen, 2013, p.28; emphasis in the original)

Mauranen (forthcoming) finds the research blog discussion interesting both as a manifestation of open, digital expansions of research discourse, and as a facet of discourse reflexivity, a key property of language which enables people to reflect on language and its use. Linguistic reflexivity functions as powerful digital discourse (Barton and Lee, 2013, p.123). Mauranen (2014) shows that reflexivity in blog discussions, for example blog posts followed by threads, is closer to spoken dialogue than spoken monologue. There is more retrieving (referring to what had been said, e.g. as I said; just like you say) than orienting (what will be said, e.g. I would argue that; I must admit), in particular retrieving with reference to the work/words of others rather than self. Thus, by making use of discourse reflexivity, interactive written dialogue in blog discussions helps in matching perspectives by increasing precision and sharedness, which in turn contributes to co-construction of ideas and knowledge among the participants (Mauranen, 2014).

Another issue in the study of research blogs concerns the uncertainty of their target discourse community. While the blog is recognised as a type of communicative action, Mauranen (2013) wonders what ‘community’ or ‘discourse community’ (Swales, 1990) it serves. Unlike the more traditional academic genres discussed in this volume (see Samraj, etc.), blogs tend to have very heterogeneous audiences and address no specific discourse community in the Swalesian sense. Rather, specific contexts create genres such as research blogs, and communities emerge around them (Mauranen, 2013). Along the same lines, Luzón (2011) argues that academics who interact through a specific blog form ‘communities of blogging practice’: groups of people who share certain routines and expectations about the use of blogs as a tool for information, identity, and relationship management’ (Schmidt, 2007).
Thus, the discourse of research blogs is neither strictly scientific nor adapted for the popular audience. As Mauranen (2013) shows, bloggers themselves manifest genre awareness of finer distinctions in blogging about science:

*Not your typical science blog, but an ‘open science’ research blog. Watch me fumbling my way towards understanding how and why bacteria take up DNA, and getting distracted by other cool questions.* (RRR)

*There needs to be an easier distinction between journalism, press releases, blogging and what you (and we – actual blogging is a tiny 4% of our content) do, because your work is a lot more knowledgeable than journalism and way beyond blogging in credibility. What is that term? Science 2.0 doesn’t work because you it can’t end in -ism or -ing but someone will come up with something.* (TD)

(Mauranen, 2013, p.26; emphasis in the original)

In other words, unlike the more traditional research communication channels, blogs provide space for personal expression and debate, and can be perceived as a highly social form of scholarly communication (Mortensen & Walker, 2002). For example, Luzón (2011) examined social presence and anti-social behaviour in research blogs. Having compiled a corpus of 98,000 words (based on 10 posts plus comments from 11 blogs from different disciplines), she identified 1,594 indicators of social presence (intimacy, solidarity, shared knowledge and values, engagement in personalised relations, mutual support), of which only 105 were anti-social, and these were found primarily in follow-up comments rather than initial posts. Anti-social behaviour was more common in blogs discussing controversial topics which triggered a large number of comments. Indicators of anti-social behaviour included negative socio-emotional behaviour (e.g. ‘SHUT UP!!!’), group exclusion (e.g. ‘You are an idiot’), and confrontational interaction (e.g. ‘Your assumption is naïve’). On the whole, however, a high proportion of markers of affectivity, cohesiveness, and interactivity indicates the bloggers’ efforts ‘to create and maintain a blogging community and to identify themselves as authoritative and competent members of that community’ (Luzón, 2011, p.535). Discursive strategies used by bloggers for expressing emotion, humour, phatic communication, and so forth are similar to other forms of computer-mediated communication and contingent academic genres. Thus, blogs function as social forums for self-presentation, networking, discussion, and idea testing, being more similar to face-to-face academic discourse than written genres (cf. Mauranen, 2013).

Some of the research on academic blogs has focussed on the recontextualisation of knowledge. Examining another corpus of 75 posts from 15 blogs of active researchers from different disciplines, Luzón (2013a) identified the rhetorical strategies used to recontextualise science information. She divided these strategies into two types of categories: those used to tailor information and those used to engage the reader (see Table 33.1). She concludes that research-commenting blog posts are ‘hybrid discursive spaces that incorporate practices from public and personal/private discourses (self-reference, informality, expression of feelings), from popularized discourse (humor, metaphors, references to reader), and from different genres of specialist discourse’ (Luzón, 2013a, p.453). She further argues that bloggers adopt rhetorical strategies from research papers, as well as strategies used to verbalise conflict and express criticism, typical of genres like peer reviews, book reviews, or editorials. When researchers blog about science, they evaluate and comment on the validity of others’ claims, often taking sides and providing a personal view of scientific issues, in order to convince
the reader to adopt their own views or interpretations. In other words, bloggers do not act as passive mediators of knowledge; rather, they actively promote their own opinions about scientific issues.

Luzón (2013a) also found that all selected blog posts in her corpus contained an announcement of a new finding (by other researchers) or the new contribution to the disciplines. The other most common rhetorical categories in research-commenting posts included presenting, explaining, and commenting on the results (93.3 per cent); drawing implications or highlighting the significance of the study (74.6 per cent); contextualising research (70.6 per cent); and describing and evaluation method (57.3 per cent). Interestingly, in presenting and evaluating the results, adopting a neutral or positive stance towards findings was more common (56 per cent) than questioning (16 per cent) or criticising the findings (21.3 per cent). In drawing implications and highlighting the significance of the study, the significance of the research for science (52 per cent) and implications for people’s lives (34.7 per cent) were more common than discussing broader implications (16 per cent) and implications for involved actors (13.3 per cent). This proportional distribution suggests that, despite a clear attempt to communicate with wider audiences, the bloggers in Luzón’s (2013a) study generally support their fellow researchers and interpret their findings within scientific contexts more often than within broader social contexts. Thus, although research blogs are meant to address a broader range of audiences and combine features of both written and spoken discourse, their discourse is determined primarily by research contexts.

Compared to blogs, wikis have received less attention in EAP and applied linguistics research. Although different kinds of wikis are available from different providers, Wikipedia, powered by MediaWiki, remains the largest wiki project to date. As far as personal stance

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**Table 33.1 Rhetorical strategies to recontextualize science information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies to tailor information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of terms and concept (definitions, elaboration of terms)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Paraphrases/reformulations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparisons/metaphors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examples from daily life</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Links</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visuals conveying information</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies to engage the reader</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Titles</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>References to popular lore, beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disclosure (reference to the blogger’s public or personal life)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Features of conversational discourse</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusive pronouns</td>
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<tr>
<td>References to reader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive evaluation of research or findings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative evaluation of research or findings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal expression of opinion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressions of feelings or emotional reactions</td>
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</table>

Source: Luzón 2013a, p.437
Research blogs, wikis, and tweets

and voice are concerned, Myers (2010) regards wikis as different from blogs in the sense that these collaboratively created webpages are impersonal and require consensus between different authors, at least on the main page of the Wikipedia article, while blogs encourage personal expression and debate. At the same time, any controversial issues related to the topic of the article can be discussed in ‘talk’ pages (Myers, 2010, Chapter 10). Myers also identifies some rhetorical features of the Wikipedia articles and some common trends in its creation through ‘history’ pages. As the article grows, it becomes longer, more balanced, and cautious, and, in some cases, more coherent. Some edits are accepted while others are rejected immediately, and the text gradually emerges through this uneven process. As with blogs, the ‘talk’ pages contain records of discussion and disagreement among different editors. What goes on behind the scenes is reminiscent of blog discussions, where elements of written and spoken registers are used to express stance.

However, contrary to blog participants, Wikipedia editors are not supposed to write about their own new knowledge or findings: ‘The principle is invoked to exclude people with their own theories or speculations’ (Myers, 2010, p.148). Instead of producing new knowledge, Wikipedia aims to collect prevalent representations of knowledge through collaborative writing.

Different researchers in applied linguistics have commented on the quality of Wikipedia. Crystal (2007, in Myers, 2010, p.129) refers to the Wikipedia article as ‘a fascinating, unpredictable, dangerous selection of facts and fiction’. Myers (2010, p.129) claims that Wikipedia ‘gets things wrong, indulges in triviality …, follows the biases of its users, and allows cults, flame wars and vandalism’. Dalby (2007, p.8) examined the use of English in Wikipedia and found it to be very variable due to a wide range of contributors, concluding that ‘Wikipedia is certainly not a reliable model of good English, nor of the English of native speakers… Wikipedia is an encyclopaedia for the world as it is’. Thus, like blogs, Wikipedia articles can provide interesting material for the study of English as a lingua franca in collaborative writing settings.

When referring to the high level of bias and inaccuracy in Wikipedia, both Myers and Crystal consider articles focussing on topics of relatively general interest. Contrary to their critiques, it seems that scientific knowledge is relatively well communicated in Wikipedia. According to Giles’ (2005) study commissioned by, and published in, Nature, Wikipedia is close to Encyclopaedia Britannica in terms of accuracy of its science entries, announcing that ‘Jimmy Wales’ Wikipedia comes close to Britannica in terms of the accuracy of its science entries, a Nature investigation finds’ (p. 900). Thus, Wikipedia is often perceived as a credible source by scientists (for example, note the reference in the excerpt from Mauranen 2013 cited above; Luzón (2013a) also found that research-commenting posts often refer to Wikipedia). However, as the Wikipedia project grows, it keeps reflecting ‘the world as it is’ (Dalby, 2007, p. 8).

A more recent study by Giles (2013) identified 25 million entries in 285 languages but adopted a far more critical stance towards the content, arguing that ‘great swathes of human knowledge remain absent’ in Wikipedia. There is also gender imbalance (90 per cent male editors), and the most active editors live in the US and Europe. This imbalance results in a severe under-representation of knowledge about certain geographical areas: for example, many countries in Africa have fewer articles dedicated to them than the fictional realm of Tolkien’s Middle Earth (Giles, 2013).

At the same time, wikis have been discussed as offering possibilities of combining collaborative writing with explicit authorship, providing authors with due credit, and strengthening the rigour of peer review (Hoffmann, 2008). Black (2008) explores the use of Wikipedia or similar systems for the review and dissemination of academic knowledge,
proposing a change in the methods by which academic knowledge is both constructed and disseminated. He argues that the traditional peer review process should be updated in favour of more dynamic knowledge creation and management supported by collaborative writing software, which by now has begun to take place, as evidenced by McGrath’s (under review) research on the writing process of a pure mathematics research article.

As mentioned above, research on the use of Twitter in academic settings is still scarce. Some studies have explored the discourse of Twitter in different social and professional contexts (e.g. Gillén & Merchant, 2013; Zappavigna, 2012). As far as academic contexts are concerned, tweets have become very common in conferences and lectures (Barton & Lee, 2013, p.157) to keep participants connected during the talks and updated in parallel sessions. However, Twitter is also used by scientists all over the world on a daily basis. Myers (2013) argues that Twitter is used to connect scientists in different parts of the world and reveals how science is really done. Like research blogs discussed above, the tweets examined by Myers display tensions between empiricist and contingent repertoires (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984); for example, communicating scientific versus everyday matters.

The top keywords in Myers’ (2013) science tweet corpus included: paper, scientists, research, data, evidence, style, journal. Other salient features were the overuse of ‘I’ (not common in other tweets), ‘of’ (more complex noun phrases), ‘but’ (concession), ‘may’, ‘maybe’, ‘some’ (hedging), and ‘love’ (evaluation). Overall, scientists on Twitter present themselves as a single, rather closed, community, sharing norms and focusing on work. When they emphasise the moment, the everyday, they use what others do on Twitter. However, time references produce a different representation of science ‘behind the scenes’, different from academic journals and popularisations. Contrary to some popular stereotypes, the tweets in Myers’ corpus reveal that science is like any other work, with its own routines and day-to-day problems. Thus, compared to research blogs, tweets display even more features of the contingent repertoire.

**Methods in the study of research blogs, wikis, and tweets**

Studying academic language online opens new possibilities for developing research methodology, as the internet provides free access to large amounts of textual data. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used in different studies of online discourse, including the above-mentioned research. A common approach in the study of research blogs, for example, has been to compile a sufficiently large but manageable corpus of posts and comments, and then qualitatively examine specific discourse features such as stance (e.g. Myers, 2010, Chapter 7), rhetorical strategies (e.g. Luzón, 2013a), or reflexivity (e.g. Mauranen, forthcoming). The design of the wiki software, with its ‘history’ and ‘talk’ pages, offers researchers possibilities to compare different versions of the same text and to relate its collaborative construction to interaction between different authors (e.g. Myers, 2010, Chapters 9 and 10; Kuteeva, 2011). Myers’ (2013) corpus of science tweets has been examined for both frequencies and rhetorical functions.

Barton and Lee (2013, Chapter 12) provide an overview of three major phases in the study of language online. During the initial phase, researchers focussed on the structural features of computer-mediated communication (e.g. Ferrara, Brunner & Wittemore, 1991, Shortis, 2001), creating large corpora of data randomly collected from the internet in order to identify new varieties of language and its online uses. Barton and Lee (2013) believe that during this phase, researchers tended to overgeneralise their findings, and paid little attention to context and variation within the same type of discourse. During the second phase
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(e.g. Herring & Paolillo, 2006; Lee, 2002), researchers focussed on specific types of language online and also complemented the findings based on corpus analysis with qualitative data, such as interviews, in order to acknowledge variation and context-dependency in language use. During a more recent phase, concepts and theoretical frameworks from the social sciences contributed to a broader view of language online in connection to language ideology. For example, Davies and Merchant (2007) analysed research blogging as social practice, adopting an auto-ethnographic approach (Anderson, 2006) in the study of their own blogging practices. Gillén and Merchant (2013) adopt a similar approach in their study of Twitter. Barton and Lee (2013, p.166) also view language online as ‘situated social practice’, with the overall methodological assumption that online texts should be studied in connection with social practices. The most recent development in researching language online concerns the use of concepts such as ‘superdiversity’ promoted by Blommaert and Rampton (2011) and inspired by Vertovec (2007) who characterised it by a dramatic increase in the categories of migrants as well as their motives, patterns, and itineraries of migration. For example, Discourse, Context, and Media dedicated its most recent special issue to the topic of digital practices in superdiversity (Androutsopoulos & Juffermans, 2014). Both Barton and Lee (2013) and Myers (2013) stress the importance of mixed methods and further qualitative research into online language uses.

The issues of research ethics and privacy have gained a new dimension in the study of language online. When Myers was writing his book (2010) on the discourse of blogs and wikis, he intentionally included the material that was meant to be read by the widest possible audience. Nevertheless, the issue of the bloggers’ copyright and ownership of their words arose, which led Myers to request permission from the most frequently cited bloggers. Most of them did not reply to this request but he managed to obtain written consent from a few (Myers, 2010, p.162). Ethics in the use of online material has been a subject of debate among researchers (e.g. Engesem, 1996; Herring, 2002), who have discussed the issues of privacy in what is considered to be an open and public space. The main challenge in studying language online is to keep a balance between protecting study participants and obtaining authentic data.

Pedagogical applications

EAP education in the digital age calls for new pedagogical paradigms which can help our students to develop new literacies and skills required for successful communication in academic and professional contexts (Yim and Warschauer, this volume). As was noted in the opening editorial of Journal of English for Academic Purposes, ‘the full implications of the communications revolution are not yet apparent or completely understood, and we still have a long way to go before we can be sure we are using its potential most effectively in our teaching’ (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p.8). The social web applications offer a greater potential for empowering learners to create online content. Thus, online collaboration can facilitate learners’ integration into given discourse communities or specific communities of practice (Wenger, 2006). Blogs, wikis, Twitter, and other social networking applications have been adapted in language teaching and learning (for an overview, see Barton & Lee, 2013, pp.153–163). They show how to adapt existing pedagogical practices in new ways by incorporating the use of blogs, wikis, YouTube, Twitter, and other social media in classroom-based teaching and learning. They also discuss how online practices can impact language teaching and learning, with a particular focus on autonomous language learning, understanding learners’ and teachers’ everyday practices, new pedagogies, and language policies.
In her review of studies focusing on the development of students’ stance and voice in academic discourse online, Hewings (2013) concludes that digital media provide space in which students can experiment with their voices and rehearse arguments in collaboration with peers. However, the change of writing medium per se does not automatically result in any improvement: EAP instructors still need to ensure a careful task design, to monitor and moderate interaction, and to introduce assessment of online writing tasks. Using blogs, wikis, and other Web 2.0 applications, students can either maintain their traditional ‘academic persona’ or can be more experimental by trying out multiple different voices in their academic writing. For example, Murray, Hourigan and Jeanneau (2007) report on integrating blog writing for academic language learning purposes. The students in their study were required to write academic blogs as a compulsory element in their language module assessment. The data provided by these students raised several pedagogical questions related to integrating, assessing, and rewarding student creative expression on the blog, their self-reflection as language learners, and the role of blog writing in language acquisition. Kuteeva’s (2011) research on the use of wikis in an EAP writing course demonstrates the constructive potential of wikis in creating knowledge and in helping students become better writers by considering their target audience. Similarly, Windsor and Park (2014) explored their experience of designing wiki tasks aimed at developing the processes involved in reading when preparing for academic writing. In her book-length study of collaborative L2 writing, Storch (2013) dedicates an entire chapter to computer-mediated collaborative writing with a particular focus on wikis.

Interestingly, instruction on how to use social networking for knowledge dissemination has moved beyond the traditional EAP classroom. For example, in spring 2014, The Guardian, a leading British newspaper, was offering a series of lectures on science blogging. Their course involved both scientists and journalists, and focussed on different aspects in blog writing, such as the rules of scientific writing (and when to break them); the flexibility of the blog format; building a community and an audience; covering very technical subjects; using humour in blogs; and developing your own voice. The newspaper found a niche for this type of course because blogs ‘offer a much larger range of voices that have enriched the scientific conversation online and engaged new readers with a depth and style that is sometimes missing from mainstream media’ (The Guardian, 2014).

Summary and further directions

This chapter has sought to show how the development of digital media has impacted academic discourse online, with a particular focus on blogs, wikis, and Twitter. By now, science blogs have branched out in different directions, in particular blogs by scientists themselves and blogs by science journalists and publishers. Blogs kept by active researchers are often part of the open-access movement and often challenge the academic establishment (e.g. Chembark www.blog.chembark.com). Research blogs also display features of the contingent repertoire and are used by researchers for fun and witty comments. As far as wikis are concerned, Wikipedia has no comparable rival and is increasingly accepted in scientific circles although still unbalanced in content. In addition, project wikis are often used as alternatives to homepages because they are collaboratively constructed and more frequently updated (e.g. the OpenWetWare project started by students at the MIT www.openwetware.org). Twitter is used to mediate the daily routines of scientific work and to keep researchers and collaborators connected, often at academic events. Like blogs, tweets also combine features of the empiricist and contingent repertoires.
Thus, digital media provide new venues for academic and scientific communication, and contribute to the development of new academic genres. At the same time, they also offer a potential to connect researchers in ‘the kind of openness and community that were the supposed hallmarks of science in the first place’ (Waldrop, 2008, p.73). There is a wide scope for further EAP research on online discourses in academic settings, and, due to their fast development, the integration of new technologies in EAP courses will always remain work in progress.

Traditional EAP instruction relies on a vast body of ESP research on academic genres (see Shaw, this volume), which has been fundamental in empowering researchers worldwide. At the same time, the communicative practices in academia keep evolving, and we need to pay more attention to the social actions that our students will need to perform when they join their respective research communities. Since the online genres tend to be more dialogic and make more use of English as a lingua franca compared to traditional research genres, EAP instruction needs to consider introducing more focus on interactional pragmatics than we have done so far. Despite added challenges associated with any innovation, increasing uses of digital media in our classrooms can result in the development of new teaching methods and provide opportunities for further research in the field.

Further reading
Barton and Lee (2013); Myers (2010); Zappavigna (2012)

Related chapters
44 CALL and electronic media

References


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Research blogs, wikis, and tweets


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