

---

---

## Conference Review

# Review of the Second CUE ESP Symposium

John Blake

*Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology*

Dubhgan Hinchey

*Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology*

The second CUE ESP Symposium was held on September 7, 2013 at the Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (JAIST). The first symposium was hosted at the Nara Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, so it seems fitting that the second one be hosted at its sister institute. Located in Nomi City, JAIST is a 20-minute drive from Kanazawa, the largest city in the Hokuriku region. The tagline of this year's symposium was "Getting Published in English: Opportunities and Obstacles". All the presentations and a number of the posters directly addressed various aspects of this topic. The symposium was attended by a dedicated group of enthusiastic ESP practitioners with most participants coming from Hokuriku, but some from as far as Hokkaido and Tokyo. Surprisingly, for Japan's wettest prefecture and one that boasts the saying "you can forget your bento, but don't forget your umbrella", the day was clear, although in the evening the skies opened. The symposium officially started with a warm welcome from the organizer, William Holden, a professor at JAIST.

### **From assignments toward publication: Brokering academic writing**

John Adamson (University of Niigata Prefecture) and Theron Muller (University of Toyama) were the first to take the floor and gave a joint plenary.

Both are associate professors and have many years of experience as reviewers and editors. John is currently the senior associate editor of the *Asian EFL Journal* and chief editor of *The Linguistics Journal*, while Theron is lead editor of *Innovating EFL Teaching in Asia*, published by Palgrave Macmillan and teaches an online academic publishing course. The plenary explored the theory and research relating to the interdisciplinary nature and co-construction of research papers. The importance of responding to advice from reviewers was emphasized, and similarities were drawn between peer comments on essays in English for Academic Purposes courses and the reviewer-author interplay in the publication process. A key theme throughout this talk was on the collaborative nature of writing for publication. By assigning roles to students, such as author, co-author, reviewer, column editor and editor, and creating a class journal, students could gain hands-on experience in the publishing process. This could be one way in which teachers of academic writing could narrow the gap between the individual nature of classroom writing and the actual collaborative nature of publishing.

### **Write like an engineer: Teaching writing in the Japanese EFL classroom**

The next session was an interactive workshop led by Atsushi Iida, an assistant professor at Gunma University, whose research interests include poetry writing and scholarly publication in a second language. He addressed how genre-based approaches can be adopted in the classroom to make connections between first-year general English and second-year engineering English. He demonstrated an engaging descriptive writing lesson for engineering students in which he emphasized the importance of focusing on the content (what to say) before dealing with the form (how to say it). He showed how a general description can be improved by incorporating specific details. His focus was on getting students to state key details such as dimensions and materials before sorting out how to link the terms into clauses and sentences. He demonstrated effective use of a visualizer as well as providing memorable comparative examples of vague and clear descriptions of an iPhone.

## **The vocabulary and style of engineering research abstract writing**

After an impromptu and much appreciated coffee break, Matt Apple, associate professor at Ritsumeikan University, was the next on the agenda. His research interests include ESP, individual differences, and second language vocabulary. In his presentation, he shared the preliminary findings of a pilot comparative study investigating the differences in vocabulary levels and writing styles between abstracts written by a cohort of engineering students and those published in conference proceedings. A gap in vocabulary knowledge was identified, and the discrepancy between students' abstracts and IEEE abstracts was described in terms of phraseology, specialist terminology, and rhetorical forms. For teachers unfamiliar with corpus linguistics, this was a gentle introduction into the capabilities of concordancing software (AntConc in this case) and how corpus linguistics can inform teaching practice by enabling teachers to provide more precise advice to their students. Attendees learned that by using the keyword list function of AntConc on a corpus of texts, they could identify vocabulary that is particularly common among those texts.

## **Editing and reviewing: Composing constructive feedback for authors**

Theron Muller took the podium again for the final presentation and gave an interactive talk on providing constructive feedback on draft articles rather than adopting an adversarial approach. His use of the term "pit-bull reviewer" to describe a reviewer who tears apart a manuscript with little thought for the feelings of the author seemed to resonate with a great number of us in the audience. The strategies presented should help participants draft more constructive comments on students' work and colleagues' manuscripts, or when reviewing academic papers.

## **Poster session**

Having attended four consecutive presentations, the poster session provided a welcome change of pace and focus. There were 14 poster presentations on a variety of topics from genre-based analysis of moves in research abstracts to the

English language needs of material scientists. Over light refreshments, presenters discussed their posters and answered questions regarding their content. It was wonderful to see so many teachers concerned with appropriately supporting their students' publication process. The discussion was lively and cut short only by the announcement of the start of the roundtable discussion.

## **Roundtable**

After the poster presentations, everyone retired to the plenary hall where the invited speakers were joined by the Melodie Cook, the current *JALT Journal* editor, in hosting a roundtable discussion. William Holden kicked off the session by posing a series of questions centered on the review process for academic publications and what authors should know and can do to increase the odds of getting published. A great deal of time was spent discussing reviewer comments, which to us seemed highly pertinent, as reviewers are key gatekeepers on the path to publication.

The overall consensus seemed to be that the majority of journals do not train their volunteer reviewers, which can lead to vast differences in tone and usefulness of reviewer comments and suggestions. Some of the other issues discussed were learning how to deal with rejection, how to act on the review comments, and how to join the discourse community by getting involved in the publication process.

## **Conference dinner**

A convoy of cars driven by volunteers left JAIST and took participants to the conference dinner held at Shirubei, a trendy fusion café bar in Katamachi, in the heart of the entertainment district in downtown Kanazawa. We enjoyed an array of local seafood delicacies naturally accompanied with shōchū and malted beer, although the designated drivers dutifully limited themselves to fresh fruit juices and ginger ale. Over dinner, business cards were exchanged, new friendships established, and old friendships renewed. Lively discussion ensued on a variety of current trends in higher education in Japan with participants sharing their unique personal experiences.

## Conclusion

A key theme that resonated with participants was that conflicting reviewer comments and the lack of an academic support network can negatively affect the ability of new authors to secure their first publication. This can be ameliorated by giving aspiring authors a better understanding of the iterative and collaborative nature of the review process. This conference was probably most beneficial for participants with few publications to their name, as they could learn more about the publication process from those with more experience. One downside of the conference was the rural location, since for those coming by train from Tokyo, the journey would have taken around four hours, but for us the location was ideal as it was a short stroll from our houses. We will, however, eagerly make the trek in the opposite direction to the third CUE ESP Symposium in 2014, slated for Waseda University, Tokyo. If you would like the opportunity to network with like-minded professionals, establish collaborative research and partnerships, and learn from the experience of other teachers and researchers, please check the JALT CUE SIG Web site for updates on the next symposium.

## Authors' bios

*John Blake is a research lecturer at the Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology. He has taught English at universities and schools for over 20 years in Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong and the UK. His main research interest is corpus analysis of scientific research articles. johnb@jaist.ac.jp*

*Dubhgan Hinchey has taught English in Japan for over 10 years. He is a research lecturer at the Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology where he is the writing lab coordinator and Moodle online courseware administrator. His research interests include e-learning platforms, content management systems and extensive reading. dbinchey@jaist.ac.jp*

Received: November 11, 2013

Accepted: March 3, 2014