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## THE EFFECT OF THE ACADEMIC CULTURE ON PRODUCING GENRES IN L1 AND L2<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

By the 1940s, writing term papers became a feature in composition textbooks (Ballenger 1992), and since then numerous style guides and manuals have been published to help students in producing this academic genre according to its standardized conventions. These guide books such as Winkler/McCuen (1979), Gibaldi/Achtert (1980, 1988), Kane (1983), Willis (1983), and Hamp-Lyons/Courter (1984), among others, provide detailed information on the different aspects of writing the term paper. They give information on collecting data including choosing a topic, compiling a working bibliography, taking notes and writing drafts, in addition to information on ethical issues, such as plagiarism and misinterpretation. Besides, they provide instruction on the mechanics of writing including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, numerals, titles in texts, transliteration and quotation. They also give information on the standardized frames including footnotes, methods of documentation, citing sources of information, illustrations and bibliography.

In addition to these manuals, which deal with the basic principles of writing term papers, several guidebooks have been published to give advice on writing technical reports and research papers especially in science and technology, such as Huckin/Olsen (1983), Weisman (1985), and Neufeld (1987), among others.

Writing term papers has also become a major component in freshman English courses and in English as a second language programs in many colleges and universities. A number of these institutions have even developed their own manuals for writing research papers, such as the University of Illinois at Chicago (Courtois 1985), the University of Arkansas (Dew 1985), and the University of Mississippi (Graves/Adams 1988).

Since the importance of writing the term paper as an academic genre has been well-recognized, many studies have been conducted to investigate the efficiency of teaching this

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genre through the freshman English courses and to suggest various approaches for improvement (Coons 1983; Moran 1984; Strickland 1986; Shook 1988). Other studies, such as Swales (1987), Brenner (1989), and Feldman (1989), have given more attention to providing instruction on writing term papers to non-native students concentrating on the problems they face, their causes, and their solutions. I reported somewhere else that Jordanian students writing term papers in English face problems in macro-structure, plagiarism and citing references (Mustafa 1994, 1995). I found that these problems are related to the type of instruction they receive on this genre and the variation in their professors' evaluation of its different aspects. Also Crowe (1992) reported that Asian students writing term papers in English face problems in integrating sources from research, developing transition, cohesion and plagiarism. He found that these problems are related to different rhetorical and educational backgrounds.

As mentioned earlier, research has considered producing this genre in certain fields, in fact, it has also dealt with its specific conventions in those fields including the issues addressed and the ways to resolve them by various lines of reasoning, the purpose of communication, the assumptions about the audience, and the standardized frames. For example, Dew (1985) concentrates on term papers required from engineering students, Faigley/Hansen (1985) investigate research papers in psychology and sociology, Dubois (1988) discusses biomedical research papers, and Dunn (1993) deals with teaching writing term papers in chemistry.

Since the standardized frames and conventions of research papers vary from one discipline to another (Purves 1986; Swales 1987), it has been reported that the professors in each field introduce their students to the professional writing in that field (Walvoord/McCarthy 1990; Chiseri-Strater 1991; Currie 1993). However, the role of the writing courses for both native and non-native speakers, which have been the responsibility of the English departments, should not be ignored. They can provide the basic skills of writing research which are not very different among the various disciplines, and give options and models to choose from (Shih 1986; Dubois 1988; Ballenger 1992; Leki/Carson 1993; Mustafa 1994, 1995).

It is clear that most research on writing term papers has been directed towards providing instruction on this genre and the problems faced by the students in its production ignoring other factors in the academic setting which can be of major importance. As mentioned earlier, I found that the professors' evaluation of this genre conventions seems to be the main factor affecting their application by the Jordanian science students in L1 and L2. The aim of this research project is to find out if the significance of this factor is governed by the

academic system in which this genre is produced. It also aims at investigating the effect of the academic system on other aspects of producing this genre, such as the students' awareness of its standardized frames in L1 and L2, and their perceived degree of difficulty faced in their application. These factors will be investigated in two different academic cultures: Jordanian and German.

The term paper standardized frames considered in this study are more or less the same as those dealt with in writing manuals and guidebooks. These include the main parts of this genre; the thesis statement, the table of contents, the introduction, the body including major sections and subsections, the conclusion and the references. These parts are considered in terms of basic content, form and placement. Other aspects of the term paper investigated are citation of references in text and quotations, and these are also considered in terms of the same criteria mentioned above.

## BACKGROUND

This study is based on data collected from professors and undergraduate students of English linguistics and literature in two universities with different academic systems: Yarmouk University in Jordan and Philipps University at Marburg in Germany. Yarmouk University follows the credit hour system, in which the course grade of undergraduate students in humanities is based on two tests during the semester and a final exam. However, in some courses, students are required to write term papers, which should be in Arabic unless they are submitted for English courses then they must be in English. On the other hand, Philipps University at Marburg follows the semester system, in which the course grade of undergraduate students in humanities is based on oral presentations in seminars and written term papers. Of course, the papers submitted for these courses are in German, except for those written for English courses which are usually in English.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data for this research project were collected through interviews with the professors who require term papers for their courses, a questionnaire administered to the students who have taken those courses, interviews with a sample of those students and analysis of a sample of the papers they have written for those courses in L1 or L2.

The interviews were conducted with 23 professors: fourteen Jordanian and nine German; from each group, five professors were teaching English literature and four were teaching English linguistics. The other five professors were teaching an introductory course in sociology, and they were all Jordanians because it was not feasible to interview German

professors outside the English department. The professors were interviewed individually, and were asked about the term paper standardized frames they require from their students and the type of instruction they provide on these frames. They were also asked about the criteria used in evaluating this genre, the percentage given to the frames in the paper grade, and the weight given to the paper in the course grade.

The responses of the Jordanian and the German professors were analyzed separately, and the results were first compared for the two groups, then with the responses of the respective students, and finally with the results of the term papers analysis.

The questionnaire was administered to 72 undergraduate students of English linguistics and literature; 40 Jordanian and 32 German. The questionnaire consisted of nineteen items and was written in the first language of the students; Arabic for the Jordanians, and German for the Germans. They were asked about the frequency of following the term paper standardized conventions in their first language and English, and how similar they were in the two languages. They were also asked about the type of instruction they receive on these conventions; and the degree of difficulty they face in their application in the two languages. Finally, they were asked if they take into consideration the professors' evaluation of the paper frame when they produce this genre in L1 and L2.

The responses of the Jordanian and German students were analyzed, and the results were first compared for the two groups, then with the responses of the respective professors, and finally with the results of the term papers analysis.

The students' responses given in the questionnaire were verified by structured interviews conducted with a random sample of 17 students; 10 Jordanian and 7 German. The students were individually asked the same questions given in the questionnaire.

The number of the students' term papers considered in the analysis was 54; 30 were produced by the Jordanians and 24 by the Germans. The ones written by the Jordanians were 17 in English submitted for English linguistics and literature courses, and 13 in Arabic written for an introductory course in sociology, which the students majoring in English can take as an elective. The papers written by the Germans were 12 in English submitted for English linguistics and literature courses, and 12 in German written for geography courses, which the students majoring in English can take if their minor is geography.

The analysis of the term papers was based on the main parts of this genre; the thesis statement, the table of contents, the introduction, the body including major sections and subsections, the conclusion and the references. Other aspects considered in the analysis were citation of references in text and quotations. The papers were first examined for having the essential parts; then each part was analyzed for its basic content, form and

placement. The other aspects of the papers mentioned above were also analyzed in terms of the same criteria.

The results of analyzing the papers written by the Jordanian and the German students in L1 and L2 were compared with the standardized conventions required by their professors, then the results for the two groups were compared.

It should be noted that the term paper standardized frames are more or less the same in German and English. However, there are some differences between Arabic and English regarding the placement of the table of contents, the citation of references in text and their arrangement in the bibliography.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the Jordanian and German professors' responses showed that there were no basic differences among them regarding the term paper frames they require, the type of instruction they provide on these frames and the weight they give them in the paper evaluation. However, there was a basic difference among them in the weight they give to the papers in the course grade. Most of the German and Jordanian professors required and expected their students to conform to the term paper standardized format given in writing manuals and guide books, while some required the organization of the research articles published in the specialized journals. Therefore, the students in the two universities were usually referred to the various handbooks on writing term papers and research reports, and sometimes to the style sheets of the specialized journals in each field, such as the MLA style sheet for literature and the LSA style sheet for linguistics. The only other source of information for the students was a general idea given in the class or in private consultations with the professors. However, in one course, sociology, the Jordanian professors provided detailed class instruction on writing term papers as a part of the course. It should be mentioned that the students majoring in English linguistics and literature in both universities should take writing courses, but the emphasis in those courses is on essays rather than term papers.

As for the percentage given to the frames in the paper grade, the responses of the two groups of professors varied from not considering them at all, concentrating only on the content as the determining factor in the student's grade, to giving them a third of the grade, as can be seen in Table (1) below:

Professors	The percentage given to the frames in the paper grade in L1 and L2			
	0%	10%	20%	30%
Jordanian	4	3	4	3

German	1	3	2	3
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Table (1) The percentage given to the frames in the paper grade by the Jordanian and the German professors in L1 and L2.

The figures in the table above show that the distribution of Jordanian and the German professors according to the weight given to the frames in the paper grade was very similar except for one category in which those frames were not considered at all in the grade, and which was more common among Jordanians than Germans. This could be because of the difference in the number of the participants from both groups; in fact the Jordanian professors who fell in that category were teaching sociology, for whom there were no German counterparts interviewed, as mentioned earlier.

Regarding the weight given to term papers in the course grade, the Jordanian professors gave it a minimum of 10%, which was in the sociology course; and a maximum of 30 %, which was in some English courses. In contrast, the German professors considered the term paper a decisive factor in giving the student a passing grade in the course, which means that it carried a minimum of 50 % of the grade, as can be seen in Table (2) below:

Professors	Weight given to the term paper in the course grade in L1 and L2			
	10%	20%	30%	50%+
Jordanian	5	3	6	--
German	--	--	--	9

Table (2) The weight given to the term paper in the course grade by the Jordanian and German professors in L1 and L2.

This difference among the two groups of professors in the weight given to the papers in the course grade is due to the different academic systems adopted by the Jordanian and German universities.

The analysis of the students' responses in the questionnaire showed that they all considered the weight given to the term paper conventions to be the main factor in their application regardless of language used, L1 or L2. However, there were basic differences among the Jordanian and the German students regarding the reported frequency of following the term paper standardized frames in L1 and L2, their awareness of those frames in the two languages, and their perceived degree of difficulty faced in producing this genre in those languages. The differences among the two groups of students in the reported frequency of conforming to this genre frames in L1 and L2 are illustrated in Table (3) below:

Language	% Students following term paper frames
L1 Arabic	37

L2 English for L1 Arabic	73
L1 German	72
L2 English for L1 German	70

Table (3) The reported frequency of following the term paper frames in L1 and L2 among the Jordanian and German students.

It is clear from the table above that there is a significant difference in following the term paper conventions reported by the Jordanian students when writing in L1 and L2, whereas this difference is hardly noticeable in the case of the German students. While 71% of the Jordanians who wrote papers in English thought that they had to follow a standardized format, only 37% of those writing in Arabic thought they had to. In contrast, the percentage of the Germans who thought they had to follow the term paper standardized conventions was almost the same for those writing in German and those writing in English, 72% and 70%, respectively. This discrepancy in the Jordanian and the German students' reported awareness of having to conform to the term paper standardized frames in their first language and English could probably be explained on the basis of the different academic systems adopted by their universities, specifically the weight given to the term paper in the course grade. The probability of this explanation is based on the similarities in the academic factors affecting producing this genre in the two universities except for the academic system. As mentioned earlier, the responses of the professors in the two universities indicated that they required their students to follow certain frames in their papers in L1 or L2, provided more or less the same instruction on these frames, and varied in the weight they gave them in the paper grade in almost the same fashion. However, the weight given to the paper in the course grade in the German system is much more substantial than it is in the Jordanian system. The weight given to the paper in the course grade could also be responsible for the significant difference in the Jordanian students' responses regarding conforming to the frames in Arabic and in English. As mentioned earlier, the minimum weight of 10% was given to the sociology papers, which were written in Arabic, while the maximum, 30%, was given to the English papers.

The results also show that there was a clear difference in the two groups of students' awareness of the similarities between the term paper standardized conventions in their first language and English, as can be seen in Table (4) below:

Degree of similarity of conventions in L1 and L2	% Jordanian students	% German students
Same conventions	15	88
Very similar conventions	35	12

Some similar conventions	47	--
Different conventions	3	--
Total	100	100

Table (4) Jordanian and German students' reported awareness of the term paper conventions in L1 and L2.

The figures in the table above show that 47% of the Jordanian students reported that they were aware of some similarities between the term paper basic conventions in Arabic and English. On the other hand, 88% of the German students reported that they were aware that those conventions were the same in German and English. This means that the German students pay more attention to the term paper standardized frames in their first language and English than the Jordanian students despite the similarities in the instruction both groups receive on these frames and in their varied evaluation by the professors. This could be due to the difference in the academic systems adopted by their universities as far as the weight given to the paper in the course grade is concerned, which is much more substantial in the German system than in the Jordanian system.

The analysis also showed that there were differences in the perceived degree of difficulty the two groups of students face in producing this genre in L1 and L2, as can be seen in Table (5) below:

Language used in writing term paper	% Perceived degree of difficulty		
	Not difficult	Fairly difficult	Very difficult
L1 Arabic	15	73.8	11.2
L2 English for L1 Arabic	21.5	66	12.5
L1 German	72	22	6
L2 English for L1 German	50	50	--

Table (5) The perceived degree of difficulty faced by the Jordanian and German students in writing term papers in L1 and L2.

The figures in Table (5) show a clear discrepancy in the perceived degree of difficulty faced in writing term papers in L1 and L2 by the Jordanian and German students. The percentage of the Jordanian students who considered producing this genre a fairly difficult task was more in Arabic than in English, 73.8%, 66%, respectively. Also the percentage of the students who did not consider producing this genre difficult was less in Arabic than in English; 15%, 21.5%, respectively. However, the situation is reversed among the German students; the figures show that most of those who wrote term papers in German, 72 %, did not consider that a difficult task, while this does not seem to be the case among those who wrote papers in English since half of them considered it to be a fairly difficult task.



The responses of the Jordanian students were not expected because it is usually assumed that students tend to face more difficulty in producing this genre, including conforming to its basic conventions, in the second language than in the first language. The explanation of these results could be based on the assumption that the students may not be giving the same attention and concentration to the Arabic papers (which carry only 10%) as compared to the English ones (which carry up to 30%). On the other hand, the responses of the German students were expected since it is assumed that writing a term paper in the first language, including following its basic frames, tends to be less difficult than it is in the second language.

The analysis of the Jordanian and German students' responses in the interviews showed that there were no basic differences among them in their expectation from their professors as far as formal instruction on term paper conventions and their evaluation are concerned. Both thought that the handbooks and style sheets they were referred to were not enough, and detailed class illustration was needed, however, the Jordanians felt much more strongly about this issue than the Germans. Neither were comfortable with the variation in the professors' evaluation of these conventions and indicated that they had to depend on other students' experience with the respective professors to decide on how accurate they should be about this aspect of the term paper. Nevertheless, the German students indicated that they would still try to conform to the standardized format because of the significant weight given to the paper in the course grade.

The analysis of the term papers showed that there were basic differences among the Jordanian and the German students in terms of conforming to the standardized frames. It showed that most of the term papers written by the Jordanian students in English did not conform to these frames. A large number of those papers were written in the essay format, that is, they did not have tables of contents or references, and when they did, they were inaccurate; and in few cases, the introduction was not given. Similarly, most of the papers they wrote in Arabic, for the sociology course, did not conform to those conventions either. A large number of those papers had inaccurate bibliographies, some did not have tables of contents, and in a few cases the introduction and the conclusion were missing. This is despite referring the students to books and manuals where these conventions are explained and exemplified, and in the case of Arabic, receiving detailed instruction and practice on the different aspects of the term paper. One explanation for not applying those conventions in Arabic and English could again be the variation in their evaluation by the professors' and in the weight given to the paper in the course grade, and in the case of Arabic, the insignificance of that weight.

As for the papers written by the German students, the analysis showed that the ones written in English conformed to the conventions under investigation with the exception of few cases which had inaccurate bibliographies or inaccurate tables of contents. The same could be said about the papers which were written in German. This is despite the discrepancy among the professors in the weight they give to these conventions in the paper grade. The explanation for this situation could be, as mentioned earlier, the significant weight given to the papers in the course grade.

#### CONCLUSION

This study suggests that the professors' variation in the evaluation of the term paper basic conventions affects their application by undergraduate students in L1 and L2. However, the significance of this factor depends on the academic system adopted by the university, specifically, the weight given to this genre in the course grade. This aspect of the academic system seems to be the main factor in conforming to this genre basic conventions regardless of the language used, L1 or L2. It also seems to affect the students' reported awareness of these conventions in both their first and second languages, and their perceived degree of difficulty faced in producing this genre in the two languages.

It is suggested that there should be co-ordination among the faculty members in every field as for the criteria set for evaluating the term paper basic conventions. It is also suggested that the weight given to term papers, especially in humanities courses, should be substantial for passing these courses so that the students would give this genre basic conventions the proper attention.

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