The Use and Misuse of Academic Words in Writing: Analyzing the Writing of Secondary English Learners and Redesignated Learners

ANDREA MARIE CONS
University of California Irvine

This study investigated the specific ways secondary English learners (ELs) and redesignated fluent English-proficient learners (RFEPs) use academic vocabulary that assesses interpretive reading and analytical writing ability. The research examines how ELs and RFEPs, formerly ELs, differ in use and misuse of academic words. The study extends Olson's (2007) work by analyzing how secondary students use academic words correctly and incorrectly. The results indicate that although both groups rarely used academic words, RFEPs used significantly more academic words and made fewer academic word errors than ELs. Qualitative analyses reveal that RFEPs used academic words to add cohesion, details, and precision in their writing to a greater extent than ELs. Findings have three pedagogical implications. First, ELs need more exposure to academic words in writing. Second, ELs need explicit instruction on how to effectively use academic words in writing. Third, ELs need more writing practice in general to become more comfortable with the act of writing so that they will feel more comfortable using more words overall, specifically academic words. Thus, writing should be assigned often. Also, because ELs and RFEPs used few academic words in their writing, both groups need more exposure to and practice with using academic words in writing.
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Effective vocabulary development has become a burning issue, not just in reading research but also in writing. Composition experts emphasize the critical role of vocabulary in analytical

writing (e.g., Astika, 1993; Cortes, 2002; Hakuta, 1974). Analytical writing requires students to be

> able to produce an effectively organized and fully developed response within the time allowed that uses analytical, evaluative, or creative thinking. Their writing should include details that support and develop the main idea of the piece, and it should show that these students are able to use precise language and variety in sentence structure to engage the audience they are expected to address. (Loomis & Bourque, 2009, p. 10)

Unfortunately, the number of students in the United States who need extra help learning vocabulary has burgeoned in recent decades. All available research demonstrates that they are often limited in their knowledge of words in analytical writing. In 2007, for instance, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) administered a writing assessment to approximately 165,000 public and private school students in Grades 8 and 12 throughout the nation (Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008). Fifty percent of public school students in each state (except Connecticut and Massachusetts) were considered nonproficient (at or below basic). The NAEP data also confirm large and consistent gaps between the writing performance of English learners (ELs) and native English speakers.

High-stakes tests such as the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which all California high school students are required to take and pass prior to graduation from high school, can have serious consequences for students who do not pass. There are negative consequences of failing to do well on national and state tests, such as placement into remedial courses and even failing to earn a diploma.

There is a dearth of research on the academic writing of secondary ELs. As seen in the 2007 NAEP scores, more than half of all secondary students tested were considered nonproficient in writing (Salahu-Din et al., 2008). It is important to consider such data and to learn more about the academic writing of secondary students, specifically ELs.

A major reason that students fail to do well on tests like the NAEP and CAHSEE is that they lack proficiency in vocabulary (Fraser, 1998) and are unable to use academic words effectively in

analytical writing (Zamora, 2011). Using a word effectively in this type of writing requires a breadth of word knowledge, entailing, among other things, knowledge of a word's literal meanings, connotations, the grammatical and lexical environments in which it occurs, morphological features, and semantic associates (e.g., synonyms, antonyms). ELs' vocabulary problems increase when they reach secondary schools, where they are exposed to large numbers of academic words and required to use them accurately (Chall, 2000). In fact, at each grade level vocabulary expectations increase dramatically (Nagy, Diakidoy, & Anderson, 1993). ELs who enter school with limited vocabulary knowledge face larger language obstacles than their peers who have rich vocabulary knowledge (Baker, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1997).

Do ELs have the vocabulary proficiency they need to succeed in English language arts classes? What about former ELs who become redesignated fluent English-proficient (RFEP)? What is known about these two groups' abilities and inabilities to use academic words? This article explores such questions, specifically focusing on ELs and RFEPs. In the context of this study, ELs are defined as students who are not yet ready to participate in mainstream courses due to limited English proficiency and require language learning support. RFEPs, on the other hand, have gained enough proficiency in English to read and write at grade level, are placed into mainstream courses, and no longer receive language support (Ragan & Lesaux, 2006).

RATIONALE

One primary reason for this research is to augment past studies on academic words and ELs at the secondary level. Although some studies have investigated how ELs use academic words (e.g., Carlo et al., 2004; Gilquin, Granger, & Paquot, 2007), there is no research on how ELs use academic words in comparison with RFEPs.

Another reason for this research is to gain a better understanding of the specific ways in which RFEPs and ELs produce written language for academic purposes. Many researchers have focused on the use of academic words in writing (Scarcella, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2001; Yde & Spoelders, 2008); this study focuses on both the use and misuse of academic words. A

related reason for this research is to show the importance of academic words in establishing cohesion in EL and RFEP writing. Although some studies have examined cohesion in adult second language writing (e.g., Berzlánovich, Egg, & Redeker, 2008; Kai, 2008; Poskiene, 2009), this study examines the academic writing of ELs at the secondary level. The more academic words students use correctly to establish cohesion, the more effectively they write (Scarcella, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2001; Yde & Spoelders, 2008). Corson (1995) refers to knowledge of academic words as a "lexical bar" (p. 27), a barrier to students' learning academic language, and suggests that all students must transcend this barrier in order to use academic language effectively so that they can be successful in school.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review begins with an overview of literature on academic words to highlight the importance of academic word use in effective writing. Next, it addresses the ongoing national debate on reclassification of ELs and discusses the potential ramifications that federal, state, and district policies may have on language minority learners' academic achievement (Ragan & Lesaux, 2006).

General Academic Words and Effective Writing

General academic words are critical in effective academic writing. They do not characterize a specific content area; rather, they are used in a variety of content areas—more specifically, literature, social science, science, and mathematics (Coxhead, 2000). Secondary students need to be familiar with such words because they will be expected to use them effectively in writing assignments. Effective academic writing is measured by genre for which state standards provide a list of skills students should acquire at each grade level. This study examines expository writing of students enrolled in English language arts (ELA) courses Grades 6–12. Expository texts report, explain, and argue, which require specific grammatical features. An authoritative voice, the third person pronoun, and *being/having* verbs are characteristic of expository writing. In addition, the present tense is typically used, noun clauses are expanded using adjectives or

prepositional phrases, clauses are linked together, and concrete details are expanded upon (Schleppegrell, 2003). Table 1 provides examples of academic words that are included in the most frequent words used in academic writing.

Academic word use is necessary for success in school, and a primary measure of success is high-stakes testing in which all students, regardless of their language proficiency levels, are expected to read, write, and demonstrate their knowledge using academic words (Bielenberg & Wong-Fillmore, 2004; Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006). This is also true for classes in which students are enrolled across content areas. Standardized assessments such as the CAHSEE require students to understand and use academic vocabulary effectively. Research on academic vocabulary has relied heavily on corpus-based studies and compiled word lists taken from academic textbooks (e.g., Coxhead, 1998; Nation, 1990; West, 1953; Xue & Nation, 1984). These word lists group words differently according to such factors as representativeness, frequency and range, and word families. Knowing academic words entails knowing more than word forms. To use words effectively, students must have morphological knowledge (Nagy & Scott, 2000).

Academic Words and Morphology

Morphology refers to the study of the structure and content of word forms. Morphemes are meaningful word parts and, when combined, can make up new words with new meanings (Nagy & Scott, 2000). For example, the words *sign* and *signature* share the common morpheme *sign*, and, therefore, a connection can be made between the two distinct forms. Knowledge of word families such as this one can improve cohesion in writing. Anglin (1993) found that vocabulary knowledge grows as the knowledge of root words increases, and this increase appears to reflect morphological awareness, that is, interpreting new words by breaking them down into individual morphemes. Therefore, knowledge of word parts such as prefixes and suffixes can contribute to students' overall vocabulary knowledge. In addition, the majority of words composed of more than one morpheme are "semantically transparent" (Nagy & Anderson, 1984, p. 312), that is, their

TABLE 1. Academic Words From the Academic Word List

A–B	C–D	D–F	F–L	L–P	P–R	S–Z
affect	challenge	definition	function	legal	period	section
analysis	clarity	economic	identified	legislation	policy	sector
approach	concept	environment	income	major	principle	significant
area	conclude	established	indicate	mature	procedure	similar
assessment	consistent	estimate	individual	motivate	process	source
assume	constitutional	evidence	interpretation	method	required	specific
authority	context	export	involved	occur	research	structure
available	contract	factors	issues	outcomes	response	theory
behave	create	financial	labor	percent	role	variables
benefit	data	formula				

Source: Coxhead (1998).

meanings are predictable based on the meanings of their parts. Morphological knowledge is necessary to use academic words effectively and can improve cohesion in writing.

Academic Words and Cohesion

Academic words are particularly important for establishing cohesion. Halliday and Hassan (1976) were the first to discuss "lexical cohesion" as the "relationship achieved by the selection of vocabulary," which is composed of such elements as "reiteration, synonym, antonym, and collocation" (p. 318). Thus, word choice is important in achieving a cohesive piece of writing. Poskiene (2009) defines cohesion as a way of organizing the text and maintaining the meaning through the whole text. He also notes different strategies to achieving cohesion in writing; however, this report focuses on lexical cohesion—cohesion achieved through specific academic word choice. Research (e.g., Berzlánovich et. al, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2001; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000) suggests that lexical cohesion is prominent in information-oriented texts such as expository writing. Therefore, evaluative criteria for grading an effective expository essay will likely include the writer's ability to write cohesively. These scoring criteria are based on California state standards, which highlight necessary skills students must acquire. Students who know more academic words, and ways to use them effectively, tend to write more cohesively, and students who lack academic word knowledge, or who misuse academic words in writing, are not likely to achieve cohesion in their writing. This study explores the following research question: How do RFEPs and ELs differ in the ways they use and misuse academic words?

Classification of ELs and RFEPs

For students, a classification as EL or RFEP can have profound implications for the kind of instruction they receive. It "can affect what instructional services they receive, the curriculum to which they have access, how they are assessed, and the academic performance standards to which they are held" (Linquanti, 2001, p. 1). The term RFEP is often used as a proxy for highly proficient EL. Unfortunately, not all RFEPs have advanced English proficiency. They are not always identified accurately; hence

studies such as this one that explore the characteristics of RFEPs. Such studies must use additional means to verify students' RFEP status. These means could include a measure of English language proficiency and writing proficiency (Linquanti, 2001; Ragan & Lesaux, 2006).

METHOD

Setting and Participants

Participants involved in the current study attended urban high schools and middle schools in Southern California whose student populations were at least 90% Latino; of these, 75% were ELs. They were part of a larger study of 3,600 students in 94 ELA classrooms who came from 15 secondary schools (Olson, 2007) in the Santa Ana Unified School District (SAUSD), a district comprising approximately 56% ELs and only 7% English-only (EO) students. The district is located in an urban, low-income area in which approximately 96% of residents are Latinos, and 68% of these are limited English proficient. ELs attending SAUSD schools have consistently lower scores on standardized tests such as the CAHSEE than their EO counterparts.

Table 2 provides statistical information related to the performance of ELs in ELA compared to all students in the district, the state of California, and the county. The students in this study came from six high schools and nine middle schools and represented different levels of English proficiency. SAUSD employs a software program to randomly assign students scoring above intermediate on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) to heterogeneous group ELA classes.

TABLE 2. 2008 California High School Exit Exam Pass Rates for English Language Arts (ELA)

	Santa Ana Unified	Orange County	State
All students: ELA	69%	85%	79%
Special education: ELA	22%	43%	36%
English learners: ELA	38%	47%	40%

Source: California Department of Education (2008).

The CELDT is a test ELs are required to take each year based on information they provide on a home language survey. When students' home language is a language other than English, they are required to take the CELDT. Although students ranged from 6th through 12th grade, all ELA courses had taken the Pathway Assessment of Literary Analysis (ALA), an in-class writing exam (Olson, 2007), and been exposed to the same literature to which they were instructed to respond. Although the same ALA was administered to all students and similar vocabulary instruction was implemented early in the school year to control for differences in grade level, certain factors could not be controlled for, such as quality of instruction and consistency of ALA administration.

Measurements

The Pathway Assessment of Literary Analysis. The ALA, a two-day writing test, was administered to all students in Pathway classes in April and May. On Day 1 of the test, the Pathway teacher read aloud a short story to students, who were instructed to follow along in their own copies. Students were given a prewriting packet of literature-related tasks to organize their thoughts before beginning the essay. These activities were completed during a 55-minute class session. On Day 2, students completed their essays in the 55-minute class session, during which the teacher read the prompt aloud as students followed along in their own copies. Each student was administered one of the two thematically similar, literature-based writing prompts (Olson & Land, 2007). (See the Appendix for examples of students' writing.) Students were given no instructions in addition to the essay prompt.

Essay prompts were equated by completing a t test to determine comparability (Olson & Land, 2007). All selected papers were coded to disguise all information identifying the writer, age, school, and grade level (Olson & Land, 2007). Papers were each scored by two trained scorers, trained veteran University of California, Irvine Writing Project teachers (not from the SAUSD), with at least 5 years of secondary English teaching experience. Pathway leaders, teachers who served as expert scorers, were responsible for retraining any inconsistent scorers, serving as third

scorers, and resolving all discrepancies (2-point or greater difference on the 6-point scale). Generally, the correlation between first and second raters' scores exceeded .7. Validity of the writing assessment is suggested by moderate correlations (.3–.5) with norm-referenced assessments of vocabulary and language ability (Olson & Land, 2007).

From Olson's (2007) database of student essays, 37 EL essays and 37 RFEP essays were selected for this study and analyzed for academic word use. Following Lumley (2002), essays were chosen through a purposeful selection. ALA scores were based on a scale from 1 to 6, reflecting overall writing proficiency levels. These scores had been provided prior to selection for the current study. The researcher selected essays based on overall writing proficiency scores received on the ALA and language classification status (EL or RFEP) based on data from the CELDT. According to ALA scores, ELs' writing proficiency was uniformly lower (ranging from 1 to 3) than RFEP essays (ranging from 4 to 6).

English proficiency scale. A separate scale was used for the current study to holistically measure overall English language proficiency. This scale was developed as a way to supplement the CELDT scores, providing two measures of English language proficiency. Whereas ALA scores measured writing proficiency, the English proficiency scale measured overall English language proficiency. This was important because the study explores the ways in which two language proficiency groups (ELs and RFEPs) use academic words. Scores were determined by two trained linguists who individually read and rated the essays for English language proficiency based on aspects such as spelling and punctuation. On a scale from 1 to 5, both researchers rated the EL essays an average of 2.7 and RFEP essays an average of 4.6, indicating that RFEPs demonstrated higher English language proficiency.

Procedures

Following selection, all essays were coded for instances of academic vocabulary using Vocab Profile, a part of Cobb's (2007) Compleat Lexical Tutor, as a way to analyze vocabulary in terms of the General Service List (West, 1953) and the Academic

Word List (Coxhead, 1998). The Vocab Profile, based on an earlier offline version created by Laufer and Nation (1995), is a computer program that performs lexical text analysis and measures the proportions of low- and high-frequency vocabulary used in a written text. Essays were typed independently by two researchers, compared to make sure they were correctly transcribed, and then uploaded and analyzed. Next, the essays were entered into the text box, processed, and a text output was displayed. A color coding system provided a highlighted list of different categories of words, and a breakdown of the total number of words in each of the following four categories was given:

- the most frequent 1,000 words in English (1–1,000), both function words (e.g., *and*, *or*) and content words (e.g., *writing, language*) included in the General Service List (West, 1953)
- the second most frequent thousand words in English (1,001–2,000)
- the academic words of English included in the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 1998), which is a list of 550 word families frequently found in academic texts across subjects
- the remainder not found on other word lists (e.g., technical words, proper nouns, abbreviations)

The Vocab Profile is helpful in describing linguistic features of writing, measures which types of words are used in a particular text, and has been useful in understanding the lexical performance of ELs and RFEPs alike. However, it analyzes only word frequency. In other words, it identifies words present in the text and the frequency of these words based on different word lists. The Vocab Profile does not consider usage of words and word forms but simply accounts for their presence. In spite of this limitation, the Vocab Profile is a valuable tool in analyzing what types of words students use.

Researchers have used the Vocab Profile in studies to better understand language use across contexts and learners (e.g., Cobb & Horst, 2001; Laufer & Nation, 1995; Meara, 1993; Meara & Fitzpatrick, 2000; Meara, Lightbown, & Halter, 1997; Morris & Cobb, 2001), and findings suggest the Vocab Profile score is reliable across two texts written by the same learner, provided the genre is the same. Laufer and Nation (1995) found that

scores on the Vocab Profile correlate with scores on the Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 1990), an independent measure of vocabulary knowledge, and that Vocab Profile scores predict a range of proficiencies because learners at three proficiency levels have significantly different Vocab Profile scores (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

Academic Word Misuse Tool. To augment the Vocab Profiler, an academic word misuse tool was developed by the researcher as a way to examine how students use academic words in writing. Five units of analysis were identified in student writing, and operational definitions were created. Misuses were analyzed using the following five units of analysis: orthography (misspelling of an academic word), derivations (wrong academic word form), verb tense (wrong verb tense), plurals (using singular when plural is required or vice versa), and collocations/colligations (wrong word in fixed phrase). Table 3 outlines academic word misuse found in the writing of both ELs and RFEPs.

Effective writing is dependent not only on words students choose to use but also on whether they are able to use them correctly. The purpose of the Academic Word Misuse Tool was to examine accuracy and appropriateness of words in student writing.

HyperResearch analysis. All essays were uploaded to HyperResearch, qualitative data analysis software that visually organizes and color codes data based on categories created by the analyst. In this case, five categories were identified as characteristics of student writing, for both ELs and RFEPs: orthography, derivations, verb tense, plurals, and collocations/ colligations. The coding process was used to create categories or themes for analysis (Creswell, 2003). Each category or theme was then assigned a different code so that when each category arose in the text, that particular code was used to highlight that section of the text.

Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model was followed in analyzing the data. This model includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The process of data reduction began with the selection of 37 EL essays and 37 RFEP essays from Olson's (2007) database of 3,600 student essays.

TABLE 3. Academic Word Misuse Tool

Unit of analysis	Operational definitions	Student examples
Orthography	Misspelling of academic words	Student spells the word *motivate* as *motavate*.
Verb tense	Using present tense verb to refer to an event that has already occurred	Student uses the present tense verb *inspire* where the past tense verb *inspired* is needed.
Derivations	Using the wrong form of a word; using the wrong part of speech	Student uses the adjective *immature* where the adverb *immaturely* is needed.
Collocations/ colligations	Using inappropriate word(s) as part of a phrase including an academic word	Student uses the phrase *involved about a situation* where the preposition *in* is needed: *involved in a situation*.
Plurals	Using the singular form of a noun to refer to more than two nouns	Student uses the singular form *reaction* where the plural form *reactions* is needed.
Subject–verb agreement	Using a singular subject with a plural verb	Student uses *They motivates* rather than *They motivate*.

Students were listed as EL or RFEP based on CELDT scores. Essays were entered into the Vocab Profile and words that appear on the AWL were highlighted, thus focusing the analysis only on sentences containing academic words. Further reduction occurred as preliminary codes became more specific. For example, an initial code was "grammar," but as more essays were analyzed, it became necessary to further break down the general category into more specific grammatical aspects such as verb tense and subject–verb agreement.

RESULTS
Table 4 provides the total number of academic words used by both ELs and RFEPs. The findings of this study are clear: RFEPs used more than twice the number of academic words used by ELs (143 vs. 62). However, the percentage of academic words was low for both RFEPs and ELs. Both used less than 1%. RFEPs used

TABLE 4. Total Number of Academic Words Used

Total academic words	English learners	Redesignated students
205	62	143

.007%, and ELs used .003%.[1] Both groups' percentage of academic word use was low; however, what is noticeable is that RFEPs used more than twice the number of academic words.

Table 5 provides the total percentages and numbers of each academic word misused by both groups. ELs misused a total of 30 academic words, and RFEPs misused a total of only 15. In each of the six categories, ELs outnumbered RFEPs in the number of misused words. For both groups, the largest number of misused words was in the verb tense category; these accounted for 46.67% of all misuses for ELs and RFEPs. Inter-rater reliability for scoring of the frequency in which academic words were misused was achieved through the independent reading and scoring of a subset of the essays by two researchers, doctoral students in the area of language, literacy, and technology with backgrounds in English language and composition instruction. It is important to note that verb tense continues to be a residual challenge for RFEPs, suggesting academic words that are verbs should be explicitly taught to all ELs.

TABLE 5. Academic Word Misuse: Percentages and Numbers of Total Misuses Made by Students

	English learners	Redesignated students
Category	Number of errors	Number of errors
Orthography	3/30 (10.00%)	1/15 (6.67%)
Verb tense	14/30 (46.67%)	7/15 (46.67%)
Derivations	3/30 (10.00%)	2/15 (13.33%)
Collocations/colligations	4/30 (13.33%)	3/15 (20.00%)
Plurals	3/30 (10.00%)	2/15 (13.33%)
Subject–verb agreement	3/30 (10.00%)	0/15 (0.00%)
Total errors	30/30 (100%)	15/15(100%)

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[1] The reason it is important to note small differences in academic word use is because the Vocab Profile is very sensitive to word use, and even seemingly small percentages of academic word use make a difference in students' overall vocabulary proficiency.

Another finding is that relatively few subject–verb agreement misuses occurred. ELs made three subject–verb agreement misuses, which accounted for 10% of all misuses, and RFEPs made zero misuses in this category. In two other categories, collocations/colligations and plurals, RFEPs had higher percentages of misuses than ELs, but made fewer errors. As shown in Table 4, RFEPs used more than twice the number of academic words used by ELs.

RFEPs used academic word derivations more accurately than ELs, though they made two misuses in this category. Here is an example of a student's derivational misuse: "There behavor is impropriate for them. They were acting very *immature*" (RFEP 8). The misuse of *immature* is derivational because the adverb form of the word, *immaturely*, was needed.

RFEPs also made fewer misuses of collocations/colligations than ELs. An example of a collocation/colligation misuse is seen in the following sentence: "Lizbeth soon found herself *involved about a situation*" (RFEP 34). This collocation/colligation takes the form of a prepositional phrase. In this example, the correct form would have been *involved in a situation*. The student used the incorrect preposition *about* when the preposition *in* was needed.

It is important to note that essay length differed significantly between RFEPs and ELs. The total number of words RFEPs used in their essays was much larger than the total number of words ELs used (13,880 vs. 9,582; see Table 6).

To measure the number of misuses by each group, the number of misused words are given in proportion to the total number of academic words used by each group. As seen in Table 7, even when the difference in the number of academic words used by each group is taken into account, the previous findings hold. There is a noticeable difference in the number of misuses by each group.

TABLE 6. Total Number of Words Used in Essays

English learners	Redesignated students
9,587	13,880

TABLE 7. Academic Word Misuse: Percentages and Numbers in Proportion to Total Number of Academic Words Used in Essays

Category	English learners Percentage	Redesignated students Percentage
Orthography	4.839% (3/62)	0.699% (1/143)
Verb tense	22.581% (14/62)	4.895% (7/143)
Derivations	4.839% (3/62)	1.398% (2/143)
Collocations/colligations	6.452% (4/62)	2.097% (3/143)
Plurals	4.839% (3/62)	1.398% (2/143)
Subject–verb agreement	4.839% (3/62)	0% (0/143)
Total errors	30	15

Qualitative Findings

Academic word use by both ELs and RFEPs was also examined qualitatively, which revealed subtle differences. Repeated readings of the essays reveal that RFEP writers used specific types of academic words to add cohesion, vivid details, and precision in their writing to a greater extent than ELs.

The following examples concerning academic words and cohesion were taken from essays in response to "Marigolds" (1969) a short story written by Eugenia Collier in which the main character, Lizabeth, is upset by Miss Lottie, a lonesome old woman, and by the presence of the marigolds in her garden. Lizabeth finds the flowers to be out of place in the ugliness of the neighborhood. In the end, Lizabeth and the other children lash out at Miss Lottie by destroying her flowers. Lizabeth finds that more is destroyed than just the marigolds; she has destroyed her own childhood innocence.

RFEP students used academic transition words more effectively than ELs to make sentences cohere. RFEP Student 27[2] wrote:

> *For instance*, we as children did not believe in the word guilty; we, as the narrater believes, are innocent. *Hence*, the children's cruelty—"swarming around Miss Lottie like bees and chanting, 'Old lady witch!'"—towards Miss Lottie was unapparent to all,

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[2] After student essays were selected from the larger sample, they were assigned a number from 1 to 37 (RFEP) and 1 to 37 (ELs). RFEP student 27 refers to the essay assigned number 27 in the RFEP group.

except Lizabeth. In fact, she was not in a state of change from child to young woman, thus she felt ashamed, "I did not join the merriment when the kids gathered again under the oak in our bare yard. Suddenly I was ashamed, I did not like being ashamed." I pressume that she is slowly become a woman because she does not feel innocent—telling herself "it was all in fun"—instead she feels guilty to have lead a "malicious attack."

Notice the subtle way that the different word forms or derivations add cohesion to the paragraph, connecting ideas in linguistic ways beyond the language proficiency of ELs. There is effective use of the transition words *for instance* and *hence* indicate a movement of the text, alerting the reader to important information about to come.

Another example of the way RFEPs effectively used academic transition words comes from RFEP Student 37:

> There was something about those marigolds that caused them to react so destructively. *For instance*, someone said, "She's fooling with them crazy flowers." Probably this meant the flowers didn't match with her. Also in the story it says her marigolds are the strangest part of the picture. Which made them have more reason to distroy her marigolds.

In this example, the RFEP used the transition *for instance* to signal to the reader that an example follows. RFEPs used six total linking adverbials, whereas ELs used four.

In contrast, ELs did not use academic words as transitions. Instead they used high-frequency words such as *so* and *and* to link sentences. For example, EL Student 22 wrote:

> The kids were furious at how beautiful the flowers were. They wanted everything look how it has been all the time, ugly. *So*, they got rocks and threw them at the marigolds to show how they hated them. *And* Lizabeth was the most angriest one of her friends.

EL Student 36 wrote:

> *And* then years passed *and* miss lottie died *and* Lizabeth grows *and* she thinks about miss lottie *and* her marigols every time he looks at her marigolds *so* she thinks back *and* what she did was wrong.

RFEPs also used descriptive academic words such as *create* to make their texts more precise. RFEP Student 34 wrote:

> At the end Lizabeth and her friends had to learn a lesson of they had done. Lizabeth finds out her action was inner child-hood. She feels ashamed of what she did. She finds that "The witch was no longer a witch but only a broken old woman who had dare to *create* beauty in the midst of ugliness and sterility." So now she feels that she has to plant marigolds too.

RFEP Student 34 used the word *create* rather than the informal, high-frequency word used by EL Student 5:

> Because of that reason Lizabeth new Miss Lottie was trying to *make* the neighborhood beautiful instead of *making* it ugly. After learning her lesson she went out to go plant Marigolds.

RFEP students, in contrast to ELs, were also able to use academic words to add accuracy and descriptive detail. RFEP Student 12 wrote:

> Everyone has something that they keep to *motivate* them. In the story, "Marigolds" by Eugenia Collier a teenage girl rages out an innocent marigolds after find out her role model was weak. Lizabeth, the teenage girl, lives in a town of poverty where dust fills the air. She and her brother live in a badly constructed house with their parents. Their days are long and mostly involve loafing. But on one night, a rageful Lizabeth goes into one of the neighbors, Miss Lottie, house and crushes her precious marigolds. When your a teenager all you think about is yourself. Selfishness is a terrible thing because it leads to destruction, hate, and lonelyness. There she *released* all her hate, pulling, stomping, and crying on the marigolds. "This was the beginning of compassion, and one cannot have both compassion and innocenc." At that moment Lizabeth had lost her childhood and realized that its not all about herself.

The writer's use of the words *motivate* and *released* drive the action forward. In doing so, the writer adds accuracy and detailed description. Another example of this comes from RFEP Student 27:

> *Apparently* she is different than others in the fact that found themselves not guilty for a crime they had commited—hurting an innocent old neighbor. Perhaps their state of childhood—to do any fun activity with out any ethical thought when bored—

caused them to treat Miss Lottie and her marigolds like they did.

The writer effectively used the word *apparently* to signal that what follows is his or her commentary on the events in the story. In this way, the writer is able to move the essay forward. ELs were unable to do this and, instead, used high-frequency words that do little to add vivid detail to describe events of the story. EL Student 13 wrote:

> So when the kids saw the beautiful marigolds they kinda went into shock. Because their use to seeing everything messed up and everything dirty and destroyed. So when they saw the marigolds they *got mad* and they *felt hatered*. They called her a witch because she had such beautiful marigolds and here house was all crappy and runned down.

Rather than saying Lizabeth and her friends were *motivated* to destroy Miss Lottie's flowers, EL students simply said they *got mad*. Instead of using *releasing hatred*, as RFEP students did, ELs simply said they *felt hatred*.

Although the RFEP examples presented here contain a few errors, RFEPs' use of academic words added cohesion and provided transitions, vivid description, and precision when needed. The examples reveal the RFEPs' greater competence in using academic words in writing. They also show that because RFEPs tended to use them more appropriately than ELs, their writing tended to be more cohesive and effective.

DISCUSSION

Although ELs and RFEPs used and misused academic words in similar ways, the findings of this study suggest there were differences in the ways the two groups used them. Although both used very few academic words in their essays (less than 1%), RFEPs used significantly more than ELs. Possible explanations for this phenomenon include ELs' avoidance of academic word use due to their unfamiliarity with ways to use academic words, ELs lack of the English proficiency needed to use academic words more freely, ELs' writing shorter essays than RFEPs and therefore having fewer opportunities to use academic words or less need to

use them, and ELs' possible lack of confidence regarding how to spell or use academic words correctly in their writing. RFEPs perhaps had more exposure to academic words since being reclassified and therefore felt more confident using them in their writing. Also, differences in academic word use could be related to age and grade level.

It is important to note that RFEPs scored higher overall on their essays than ELs. RFEPs may have received higher scores because they used more direct quotations from the story than ELs.[3] Using direct quotations is also a possible reason RFEP essays were longer and contained more words overall, although there were only 6 academic words in the quotations EL students used and 13 in the quotations RFEP students used.

Also, the Vocab Profile does not identify words used in quotations and, therefore, recognized these words as the students' words. To address this problem, the researcher counted the total number of quotations used by both ELs and RFEPs in order to determine how many academic words used were included in quotes and thus were actually the words of the author of the short story rather than the student. Also, the Vocab Profile does not recognize misspelled words in the uploaded text; therefore, it was difficult to get a true number of academic words the students used. For example, although a student may have used a total of 15 academic words, if some of them were misspelled, the Vocab Profile did not recognize them. In reality, students may have used more academic words, but because they made orthographical misuses, the students were not credited for those words. To address this limitation, the researcher counted the total number of misspelled academic words used by both ELs and RFEPs in order to determine the true number of academic words used.

Despite the limitations, this study has implications for teaching academic vocabulary in secondary ELA classrooms. ELs have different vocabulary proficiencies than their reclassified counterparts. Although RFEPs did not use significantly more academic words than ELs or make significantly fewer academic word misuses, they used more words overall in their writing and

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[3] In this study, RFEPs used a total of 63 quotations, whereas ELs used 21.

qualitative analysis reveals that they used academic words more effectively than ELs.

Although RFEPs may have felt more comfortable using academic words than ELs, and used them more accurately and effectively than ELs, they still misused academic words in some instances. This study raises the question of how ELs should be taught academic words. Do ELs need more instruction, or do they require different instruction from RFEPs? What should be different about the instruction each group receives?

CONCLUSION

Results from this study have four pedagogical implications for teaching academic vocabulary in writing. First, ELs need more exposure to academic words in writing. Fewer encounters with academic words can lead these students to feel hesitant about attempting to use them in their own writing. Therefore, instruction should provide frequent opportunities to read academic texts. Second, ELs need explicit instruction on how to effectively use academic words in writing. Academic texts should be provided to students to use as models for their own writing. If students can follow an example text, this can help them feel more comfortable using academic words in writing. Third, ELs need more writing practice in general to become more comfortable with the act of writing so that they will feel more comfortable using more words overall, specifically academic words. Thus, writing should be assigned often. Finally, because both ELs and RFEPs used very few academic words in their writing, both groups need more exposure to and practice with using academic words in writing.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study provides profiles of EL and RFEP writing and highlights how and to what extent both groups of students are able to use academic words in writing. Future studies should examine academic word use and misuse across writing genres, because different genres can warrant the use of different academic words. Future studies on academic word use and misuse should also be studied by age and grade level. Also, such studies should investigate how various characteristics of ELs (e.g., English and

home language proficiency levels, different home language backgrounds) affect these students' use of academic words. Finally, as mentioned earlier, additional investigations should examine academic word use in greater detail. When and in what ways do students incorporate academic words into their writing? Are there certain patterns or sentence structures that encourage the use of academic words? In what instances do students, both ELs and RFEPs, use academic words most effectively? ELs and RFEPs are often taught in different classes; therefore, classification as an EL or RFEP can have profound implications as to the quality of instruction they receive.

THE AUTHOR

Andrea Marie Cons is a doctoral student at the University of California, Irvine. She is specializing in the language, literacy, and technology area within the Department of Education. Her work focuses on academic writing at the secondary level, specifically academic word use and misuse in analytical texts by English language learners. She is a former high school English language arts teacher and currently teaches English composition at Santa Ana College, in Southern California.

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APPENDIX
STUDENT WRITING SAMPLES

*** denotes academic word.

English Learner Essay
The story Marigolds by Eugenia Collier is a short story about a girl named Lizabeth who hates this ladie named Miss Lottie and her

marigolds. It took place in a small dusty town in Maryland in the summer. The character are poor their names are Lizabet and Joey, Lizabeth is 14 years old and Joey is 11 years old. What ***motivated*** the kids to treat Miss Lottie and her marigolds the way they did is anger, jealousy, and boredom.

Lizabeth treated Miss. Lottie very bad. They were angry at her because she hated kids. Another reason is that she hated intruders in her house. She did not like intruders in her house because her marigolds will get destroyed. Miss. Lottie lived by her self in a very ramshackle house.

Next, the kids were jealous of Miss. Lottie's marigolds. The were jealous because of her marigold nobody had flowers execpt her. Miss. Lotties marigolds were a splash of sunny yellow. Joey, Lizabeth, and the kids got a lot of stones. Joey threw the first rock and broke a marigold then Miss. Lottie said, "Who is there". All the kids threw rocks at Miss. Lotties marigolds.

Last, the kids were very bored and they did not have anything to do so they just wanted to bother Miss. Lottie. So the kids might of done that. probably the kids were bored and said, "Let's go bother Miss. Lottie and destroy her marigolds. Lizabeth was hearing his dad and mom saying that they did not have any money so Lizabeth went out and destroyed Miss. Lotties marigolds Joey stopped her.

What the kids learned is that they were being messed up to her. Miss Lottie was a lonely person she lived by her self and all she had was her marigolds. The kids were very messed up to because they destroyed her marigolds. As a result Lizabeth ended up planting marigolds

Redesignated Fluent English-Proficient Essay
"I was runnig as if furies were after me, as perhaps they were running silently and furiously until I come to where I had half known I was headed: to Miss Lottie's yard." This is the point of the story in which the main character Lizabeth lashes out towards Miss Lottie's flowers, the Marigolds. In the story "Marigolds," by Eugenia Collier, tells about a young girl who goes from a beautiful caterpillar to an amazing butterfly. She learns an important lesson which many of us might be able to relate to. Throughout her

journey she goes through fear and she lashes out against a poor innocent person.

Even in stories characters have ***motivations*** that tell why they did something. Well, I think what ***motivated*** the children in the story to act so destructively against Miss Lottie was the fact that her flowers were the only beautiful thing in her house. "Miss Lottie's marigolds were perhaps the strongest part of the picture. Certainly they did not fit in with the crumbling decay of the rest of the yard." This shows that the children believed that the marigolds which she planed didn't belong as if to say they made the house's uglyness just somehow disappear. To me it seems as if the children were jealous about her marigolds, because Miss Lottie takes very good care for them and so that makes her happy. Another ***motivation*** for why the kids acted as they did would be, the fact that they believed Miss Lottie was a witch. "When we were tiny children, we thought Miss Lottie was a witch and we made up tales, that we half believed ourselves, about her ***exploits***." This shows that they were scared of Miss Lottie, because since she old and she lived alone they thought of her as a witch. They made up tales about her which even though they weren't true, the made up tales clinged to their fears. As a result of these two ***motivations*** they treated Miss Lottie and her marigolds as they did.

The ***circumstances*** in which these characters lived were horrible, so therefore they also behaved wrong towards others. For example, "Miss Lottie's house was the most ramshackle of all our ramshackle homes. The sun and rain had long since faded its rickety frame siding from white to a sullen gray." This shows that they treated Miss Lottie as they did, because of the house in which she lived in and since she was old they enjoyed annoying her. "Beyond the dusty brown yard, in front of the sorry gray house, rose suddenly and shockingly a dazzling strip of bright blossoms, clumped together in ***enormous*** mounds, warm and passionate and sun-golden." The things that they hated most about her house though were her marigolds. To me it seems like Miss Lottie was trying to bring beauty to that place, but the children didn't understand because they were just children. Therefore, they acted so destructively against her, because they

couldn't understand her ***motivation*** for planting the marigolds.

In spite of them hating the old lady and loving the idea of annoying her, they despised the yellow sun golden marigolds even more so. For example, "For some perverse reason, we children hated those marigolds. They interfered with the perverse perfect ugliness of the place; they were too beautiful; they said too much that we could not understand; they did not make sense." This shows that, this was why the children hated the marigolds as they did. They did not understand the value of the marigolds which made them dislike them like they did. Even though the children hated the marigolds Lizabeth learned a lesson out of them. The lesson that Lizabeth learns is, that the marigolds didn't just represent beauty they represented the perseverance which they had, because ***despite*** the ugliness and horrible ***circumstances*** in which they were they grew. So, this is the lesson that I think Lizabeth learns.

As a result, the lesson that this story teaches is perseverance and beauty, because even though Lizabeth went through fear and shame she ended up understanding how Miss Lottie felt. she understood why she planted the marigolds, that is how she grew up in the side from a child to a woman.