


What is the difference between 'academic English' and 'general English'?

Show notes





In this podcast series from the British Council, we try and provide solutions to some of the key questions being asked by English teachers around the world.

Each episode explores a specific topic through interviews, a focus on recent developments or reports on British Council initiatives in English language teaching. Practical show notes, classroom activities and transcripts are available to download for each episode.

Episode overview

Just the phrase 'academic English' can sometimes make students – and teachers - feel nervous and afraid. In this episode, in the company of Tracey Costley from the University of Essex, we show that academic English doesn't have to be quite as scary as it sounds, and that academic English can actually be accessible for everyone. In the field report, we find out about a fantastic initiative at the University of Leicester for refugee-background students, who receive online support to develop their academic English skills so that they can access degree programmes at UK universities.

In this episode



We're trying to help them develop our awareness of what it would be like to study in a UK HE context, how to study independently

We decided that it would be a good idea to put on an online academic English programme specifically to meet the needs of refugee background students.”

This language is in motion like all language.

Where does Google Translate sort of end and where does the students' own writing start?

The happiest teaching I think I've done has been within EAP because I think it is dynamic.



Detailed notes

Additional information about particularly interesting, relevant, or challenging terms are given in the table below.

Phrase used	Explanation and further information
Interview with Tracey Costley	
Tracey Costley	Tracey Costley is Head of Department and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex (UK). Her research interests include academic literacies, English as an Additional Language learners, and student identity in writing at university.
A certain formality to academic language	Click here for an article by the EAP Foundation, which describes some of the main differences between 'general' and 'academic' English.
Register	According to this article on the British Council website, register "often refers to the degree of formality of language, but in a more general sense it means the language used by a group of people who share similar work or interests, such as doctors or lawyers."
So there are certain types of vocabulary that we know remain relatively consistent	The University of Manchester in the UK has an excellent ' academic phrasebank ' which contains lots of very useful fixed academic phrases for areas such as: being cautious, being critical, classifying and listing, describing trends, giving examples, and signifying transition.
L1, L2	L1 is used to refer to the student's first language, while L2 is used in the same way to refer to their second language or the language they are currently learning.
This language is in motion like all language	According to this article , "Language change is the phenomenon by which permanent alterations are made in the features and the use of a language over time. All natural languages change, and language change affects all areas of language use. Types of language change include sound changes, lexical changes, semantic changes, and syntactic changes."
Colloquial language	Colloquial language is a similar idea to 'slang'. You can read an interesting article on the British Council website

	about it here .
Dogma	Dogma relates to a fixed belief or set of beliefs that people are expected to accept without any doubts.
Google translate	Google translate – https://translate.google.co.uk/ - describes itself as “a multilingual neural machine translation service developed by Google to translate text, documents and websites from one language into another”.
Field report	
Aleks Palanac	You can find out more about Aleks’ background and her research interests here .
Refugees	A refugee is someone who has left their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations, and their claim to asylum has been recognised by the government of the country in which they are living. An asylum seeker is a person who has, similarly, left their own country because of the danger they are in, but their claim has not yet been decided, and they are awaiting an official decision.
Degree-level sanctuary scholarships	You can find out more about these opportunities here .
Universities of Sanctuary Award Scheme	Universities of Sanctuary is “a national network of university staff, lecturers, academics and students. Together we are working to make Higher Education institutions places of safety, solidarity and empowerment for people seeking sanctuary.” You can discover more at https://universities.cityofsanctuary.org/ .
Pre-sessional academic English programmes	A pre-sessional programme is an intensive course which students take in order to develop to develop their language skills so that they can participate successfully in a course at HE level.
IELTS	IELTS (International English Language Testing System) claims to be “the world's most popular English language test for higher education and global migration”. You can discover more about IELTS here .
Deidre McKenna	You can find out more about Deidre’s background and her research interests here .
HE	HE is an abbreviation for ‘higher education’.
Students as partners	According to this very useful academic article about participatory pedagogy, where students are seen as

partners in the learning process, its aims are “to promote the ideals of equity, equality and co-agency with the aim of modelling this effectively within our classrooms so that it reflects and spreads across the school community and wider society.” A participatory pedagogy is one in which students play an vital and active role in the development of the course itself – particular with regards to its contents, and the specific areas of focus.

Using this podcast for lessons or training

- You can download a transcript of the episode from the podcast homepage. To help you and your learners with preparation and language analysis, all words at the B2, C1 and C2 CEFR level have been highlighted.
- The British Council have produced an 'activity pack' for this episode, which contains activities which you can use in your classroom. The activities focus on speaking, listening, grammar and language. They are available in both pdf and in editable PowerPoint format, in case you wish to edit them to make them more relevant for your specific classroom.





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