

Reviews

ACADEMIC TRIBES AND TERRITORIES: INTELLECTUAL ENQUIRY AND THE CULTURE OF THE DISCIPLINES. Tony Becher. Milton Keynes, England: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, 1989, 197 pp.

Reviewed by Charles Bazerman

English for Academic Purposes never, in a sense, escapes the schools, as other varieties of ESP, such as legal, medical, or air traffic controller English, do. These other forms of ESP have clearly rhetorical, operational functions within the worldly tasks and institutional structures which inhabit "the real world." Understanding, competence, and instruction in these specific purpose Englishes self-evidently call for an analysis of the social terrain on which they are used and the ways in which these Englishes inhabit and animate these terrains. School English, on the other hand, may at first seem rather removed from real social action, played out in the stable, limited, and dull world of the classroom for only quasi-purposes of practice. The classroom appears to be the level, unthreatening, unchallenging, and inconsequential drill field rather than the active battlefield. Much of the analysis of English for Academic Purposes follows the logic of the drill field, considering timing, structures, and sequences of exercises and ever greater precision in the details to be mastered, and the procedures by which competent performance results.

No doubt, there is much of the drill field to the school, and much learned on a drill field carries over to the more purposeful and embattled arenas of life. Nonetheless, the academy is not just a drill field. At all levels, it is a scene of daily life, with all the transactions of life. Moreover, the higher up the academic ladder, the more education is intertwined with the specialized forms of academic life known as disciplines. The disciplines, each with their own activities, knowledge structures, social structures, and communication patterns present a rich, complex, and highly purpose-driven rhetorical field for language learning and use. English for Academic Purposes has a large stake in coming to understand the lives of the disciplines so as to better prepare students with the languages and language skills they need to participate.

For such reasons, specialists in EAP should take note of Tony Becher's *Academic Tribes and Territories* and the extensive literature the work discusses, even though the book contains little overt reference to language use and teaching. Rather, *Academic Tribes and Territories* presents an overview of what we currently know about the social and intellectual life and work of academic disciplines, enriched by the author's own extensive interview study. The perspective adopted is that of higher education studies, attempting to sort out the complex range of communities and activities housed within the university, needing enlightened administration and public support.

To the end of perceiving some order within disciplinary variety, Becher examines possible taxonomies of disciplines, and finds difficulties within all of them. Nonetheless, with cautions, he adopts several bipolar dimensions by which to categorize disciplines: hard-soft, pure-applied, convergent-divergent, and urban-rural. The first two more familiar oppositions refer to the work of the disciplines, while the latter two concern social characteristics — how tightly knit and how densely populated the disciplines are. A moment's reflection will suggest that where a discipline resides on each of these dimensions will have major consequences for the use of language within it, in terms of the representation to be constructed in the text and the linguistic resources necessary for that construction, the audiences to be addressed and the relationships to those audiences, the degree of integration of each text into a disciplinary literature and the mechanisms for that integration, and the amount of space-clearing, boundary protection, and hand-to-hand combat necessary to establish territory for one's work and to fend off competitors.

Becher uses his categories to bring together a wide array of reading from disciplinary studies, higher education studies, the sociologies of science and knowledge, philosophy, rhetoric, and applied linguistics, and to correlate the patterns he finds there with the patterns he found in his interviews with "over 220 academics spanning 12 disciplines and 18 institutions" in Britain and the United States. Among the specific topics he considers are disciplinary boundaries and specialisms, recognition and elites, fashion, reaction against novelty, communication patterns, patterns of academic careers, and the academy's relation to the wider society. Each of the discussions is filled with extensive, clearly presented, and thought-provoking synthesis and information, fraught with implications for language use necessary to cope with the complex dynamics of the disciplines. As just one example, the chapter on academic careers opens up fascinating questions about the changing linguistic needs and rhetorical demands as disciplinary members move through the various statuses of undergraduate and graduate student, post-doctoral, early career, tenure and seniority, midlife crisis, disciplinary leader, and administrator.

Because the book does not have a primary focus on language use, the EAP reader will have to do most of the work to draw out the implications for our field, but I can think of no better or more comprehensive work to introduce us to what we currently know about the rich rhetorical domain of the academic disciplines.

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DISCOURSE AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY: MEDICINE, EDUCATION, AND LAW. Sue Fisher and Alexandra Todd. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1986, pp. xvii-256.