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The reception and representation of English as an academic language among foreign students in Poland and its influence on (re)shaping individual identities

ABSTRACT. The article discusses selected problems of learning and using English as an academic language from the perspective of foreign students in Poland. The theoretical part of the paper concentrates on the issues related to the concept of identity and the status of English as an academic lingua franca, especially in the light of the growing role of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in university education. Such theoretical background is intended to serve as a kind of introduction to the discussion which centres around the influence of this specific social variation of the English language on the process of shaping or reshaping identities among students who have decided to continue their education outside their native language environment in the multilingual context of a university language department. Seen from such a perspective, university courses in EAP may be treated as a form of practical implementation of multilingual pedagogy and, more specifically, the idea of inclusive “classrooms” with a particular goal-oriented curriculum. The empirical part of the article presents the research project which aimed to examine the above-mentioned phenomena as experienced by a group of language students of different ethnic and national background who have been studying (and living) in Poland for at least a year. The main research technique used in this qualitative study was the semi-structured interview, selected with a view to obtaining an in-depth picture and highly personalised account of the process of (re)constructing individual identities in a specific social context and educational setting.

KEYWORDS: Identity, self-concept, English for Academic Purposes, genre analysis.

1. IDENTITY

The term ego identity was introduced to social sciences in 1950s by psychologist Erik Erikson. He defined it as “the awareness of the fact that there is a self-sameness and continuity to the ego’s synthesising methods and a continuity of

one's meaning for others" (Erikson 1963: 142). Ego identity was thought to enable each person to have a sense of individuality and give them an integrated and consistent sense of self. Erikson (1963) claimed that it was created and developed through constant social interaction. He also argued that since individuals are exposed to new experiences, challenges and information throughout their lifetime, ego identity is in the constant process of changing and reshaping.

The sociolinguistic approach to identity can be most accurately described by referring to Eckert (2012) and her theory of three waves in social variation studies. The first wave focused on quantitative methods that were used for examining the connection between linguistic variability and such social factors as ethnicity, age, sex and social class. The second wave was marked by the application of ethnographic methods in which the categories of description were suggested by participants. And finally, the third wave research concerns the variation within a single speaker and the different identity constructions of that speaker in a clearly defined social context.

Since its introduction, the notion of identity has been present or explored in several branches of science, including philosophy, anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, and sociology. These differing perspectives and various levels of interest in the concept of identity contribute to a considerable terminological diversity which, in turn, enhances the role of context (both social and academic) while interpreting and investigating all identity-related issues.

1.1. Social identity and self-concept

As regards the social aspects of identity, Tajfel and Turner (1986) proposed the so-called social identity theory. In their view, the term identity refers to individual's self-categorisations based on the feeling of being a member of a certain group and related affective experience. In other words, social identity is seen here as part of one's self-concept that is based on a person's perceived membership in a social group (or multiple social groups), and the value and emotional significance attached to this group membership (Tajfel 1981: 225). Typical examples of such groups include: nation, social class, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, religion, school or profession. One of the basic assumptions of the social identity theory is that being a member of a group constitutes one's self-esteem, in particular the feeling of self-worth. Therefore, affiliation with a group helps sustain social identity. Importantly, social identities are most influential when individuals consider membership in a particular group to be central to their self-concept and they feel strong emotional ties to the group (Leaper 2011).

Another interesting contribution to the debate on social and personal identity was made by Joseph (2004) who distinguished two basic aspects of identity: one's name, which allows for isolating a person from a wider group of people, and "that deeper, intangible something that constitutes who one really is, and for which we do not have a precise word" (Joseph 2004: 1). He also declared that terms such as soul, ego, self or inner self should be avoided as they bring vague connotations which deepen the terminological gap. Moreover, Joseph (2004) pointed out that the distinction between individual and group identity is very complex and rather unclear. The discrepancy results from the fact that individual identity is established in relation to various group identities, whereas group identity is often manifested in a single individual. In other words, a person finds their own self by belonging to certain groups and rejecting or distancing themselves from the other ones. In fact, individuals tend to construct meaningful and quite multi-dimensional identities as members of their social, cultural, national and/or local communities.

Last but not least, self-categorisation theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell 1987) must be mentioned here as another influential approach which tries to combine personal and social identity. In this perspective, people's self-concepts (or, in other words, self-categorisations) contain both types of identity, and the social context determines which of them becomes more salient.

In view of the above discussion, it can be claimed that self-concept is a notion which seems particularly relevant to individual social identity (as identity is an aspect or part of it). Self-concept can be generally defined as an "idea people have about themselves; (...) a complex and dynamic system of learned beliefs and attitudes that one believes to be true about one's own personal existence" (Jackson & Hogg 2010: 674). It consists of three main components:

- ideal self (what someone would like to become in future),
- public self (predictions of an individual regarding other people's opinions),
- real self (all of the thoughts and ideas that one has about himself or herself).

These three components should coexist in harmonious cooperation which is essential for proper mental health, emotional balance and consistent personality (Jackson & Hogg 2010).

According to Rubio (2014), the notion of self-concept refers to "the entity evaluated, according to the particular vision or view of that entity" (Rubio 2014: 43). In other words, self-concept is a complex idea constituted by a variety of dimensions or selves (for instance social, personal, familiar, academic and/or other situational ones). It defines a person's individuality, can predict one's behaviour and it is also composed by certain beliefs that individuals have about themselves.

It is worth underlining that any individual self-concept "is learned, it is organized and it is dynamic" (Jackson & Hogg 2010: 677). Thus, it is not an inborn trait

or predisposition, but it is something that people tend to modify or reconstruct throughout their lives. Yet, the quality of being organized indicates a relative stability and consistency of basic people's perceptions concerning themselves (although an individual may have several images of himself which are mutually synchronised). Additionally, this particular characteristic "gives consistency to the personality" (Jackson & Hogg 2010: 677). The quality of being dynamic refers to self-actualisation which may be understood as "the complete realization of that of which one is capable, involving maximum development of abilities and full involvement in and appreciation for life, particularly as manifest in peak experiences" (APA Dictionary of Psychology). Thus, individual self-concept is not a fixed construct, but it evolves during a person's lifetime in the constant process of acquiring new experiences or ideas and the removal of the old ones (Jackson & Hogg 2010).

1.2. Ethnic, racial and cultural identity

As mentioned above, there are many groups that can constitute an individual's social identity – among them one's ethnic, racial, national and cultural groups. One type of group membership which seems essential for individual identity is ethnicity (Phinney 1990). It can be explained as one's objective status as a member of an ethnic group resulting from their parents' heritage. It is characterised by common ancestry, history, and cultural traits, including language, beliefs, values, music, fashion, cuisine, and place of origin (Cokley 2007). Ethnicity provides individuals with an ethnic identity, which requires both subjective awareness and recognition of one's ethnicity. Thus, ethnic identity can be defined as the feeling of being member of a certain ethnic group which comprises self-labelling, a feeling of belonging, positive evaluation, knowledge, and involvement in one's ethnic group's activity (Cokley 2007). Another closely related concept is racial identity – yet, ethnic and racial identities are quite similar as they both rely on the sense of belonging to a group and the process of learning about one's group. Both identities are manifested in cultural behaviours, values and attitudes toward one's own group; however, while research on ethnic identity focuses on positive affects rooted in the sense of belonging to one's own ethnic group, research on racial identity concentrates on the (often disadvantaged) social position of the ethnic minority group to which an individual belongs and the consequences of this disadvantage (Cokley 2007).

Another aspect of social identity is cultural identity which involves "the integration of the complex configuration that is culture into the individual's personality" (Hamers & Blanc 1998: 116). Cultural identity refers to the extent

to which members of an ethnic minority feel they belong to the minority group or the culture of their own ethnic group (ethnic identity) and the majority group, that is the people who represent the host context or the host culture (national identity). Naturally, people who belong to the majority culture can also identify with their ethnic group and thus possess an ethnic identity (which is, at the same time, their national identity). Most often the concept of cultural identity is applied to people who belong to an ethnic minority – it is often explored in regard to people with an immigrant background, indigenous people or people who feel they belong to a particular ethnic group.

1.3. Components of cultural identity

Although identity is generally perceived as a multidimensional construct (Phinney & Ong 2007), there is no consensus on which dimensions constitute cultural identity. These components may include:

- self-categorising and labelling (identifying oneself as a member of a certain group),
- commitment and attachment (a sense of belonging and personal investment in a group),
- exploration (seeking information and experiences related to one's ethnicity),
- ethnic behaviours (participating in activities typical of one's ethnicity),
- evaluation and in-group attitudes (demonstrating positive attitude toward one's group),
- values and beliefs (sharing specific values and beliefs),
- salience of group membership (importance attributed to one's group identity).

Makarova (2008: 54) enumerates the factors that are particularly important in an individual's perception of their own cultural identity, namely the subjective cultural belonging (one's self identification) and the objective cultural belonging (one's ethnicity). The construct of identity is also influenced by the interaction of specific internal and external components (Isajiw 1990; Phinney 1990). External components of cultural identity are expressed in observable social and cultural behaviour reflected in the areas of language, social relationships, typical activities of the ethnic group or cultural traditions. Internal components of cultural identity have three dimensions: cognitive, moral and affective. The cognitive dimension includes the attitude towards oneself as a member of an ethnic group, the image of this group combined with knowledge about its traditions, values and norms. The moral dimension concerns the feeling of solidarity towards

members of one's own ethnic group. Finally, the affective dimension refers to the feeling of belonging to a given ethnic group, a kind of preference for members of one's own ethnic group as well as the feeling of security experienced among its members (Makarova 2008).

Last but not least, it has to be underlined that language is frequently considered to be the most significant factor in the construct of cultural identity. As an important component of culture and a core value in a given cultural group, it often functions as a determining aspect of an individual's cultural identity, but also as a sociocultural marker of group membership. In the same way, ethnic language is often considered to be the key aspect of one's ethnic identity. At the same time, since most interpersonal social interactions occur by means of language, it acts as a most impactful factor in one's self-expression and self-representation as well as in forming judgements about other people and their social identification. As Miller (2000) concludes, the interaction between language and identity is "tied to social practice and interaction as a flexible and contextually contingent resource, and tied to processes of differentiation from other identified groups" (Miller 2000: 72).

2. ENGLISH AS AN ACADEMIC *LINGUA FRANCA*

The global expansion of English is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the rapid development and the subsequent breakup of English as a Foreign Language (ELF) into multiple varying subdomains, each evolving to suit a particular purpose. Following a major split between literary languages and academic languages in the 1950s and 1960s, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) underwent critical development as a subdomain and became an interest of both genre-oriented and educational research (Askehave & Swales 2001). As English became the de facto *lingua franca* of academic discourse and research, the need for the standardization of this domain in terms of teaching and use quickly became an area of importance to the academic world.

As a subdomain of standard literary English, EAP is concerned with researching and teaching a language that can be used to perform academic tasks (Carkin 2005; Charles 2013). The scope of EAP is broad – it refers to the students' need to read sophisticated or demanding literature or textbooks and write essays or dissertations, but it also comprises the oratory and literary skills necessary for scholars to make the language used in conference presentations and research papers universally understandable (Carkin 2005; Charles 2013). Yet, it should be remembered that EAP is not solely influenced by literary advancement, but it is also rooted in communicative praxis. As pointed out by O'Neil (2019), increased academic communication has been an impactful variable in the evolu-

tion of EAP. This process can be visualised as a linguistic *Jenga Tower* with first instances of standardised EAP giving rise to global academic communication which laid the foundation for further development of the subdomain, and the newly enriched standardised language opening new possibilities for communication (Mauranen 2013; Luzon & Perez-Llantada 2019). Thus, EAP evolved into a domain which provides its learners and users with an increasingly complex and descriptive means of expression (Charles 2013).

Due to the extensive nature of EAP as a subdomain of English, two major approaches to EAP research should be taken into consideration, namely Genre Analysis of EAP and Investigation of the Social Context of EAP. This distinction is also relevant to the research on EAP and language identity.

2.1. Genre analysis of EAP

Genre analysis focuses on the dynamic nature of contextually produced discourse in both speech and writing (Charles 2013). In the context of this approach, Swales (1990: 58) defines genre as a “class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes”. By perceiving genre as such, one can view it as a concept worth researching in regard to its social and linguistic features (Charles 2013). In addition, Swales (2001) views genre analysis as a form of multimodality which takes into account the relationship between the situation and the context. He emphasises that such a multi-modal approach incorporates the elements of cultural, discursive and sociological analysis (Swales 2001). Such an interpretation can be also observed in Bhatia’s research (2002, 2004), in which genre-analysis ventures into the field of ethnographic studies, as well as in Bruce’s (2008) inclusion of cognitive dimension. In turn, the multimodal and interdisciplinary approach of genre-analysis allows for a more complex investigation of the wider usage of EAP and the impact it may have on the genre user (Carlin 2005; Charles 2013). The primary application of the multimodal approach is to effectively assess the influence of blending academic genres with ordinary ones across domains and languages. Loi (2010) conducted a comparative study of introductions to research articles across academic genres in English and Chinese. His findings suggest that the Chinese genre of academic language benefits from the influence of EAP. He claims that Chinese academic writing lacked a traditional way of opening an article. As a result, the impact of global EAP usage prompted Chinese academics to adopt an aspect of a foreign genre into their own. In a different study, Hyland (2011b) uses genre-based analysis of academic authors’ biographical statements, thesis acknowledgements and prize applications to study a cloaked process of developing self-presentation

skills and identity. He argues that academic identity and the ability to present oneself develop through rhetorical competence in a given genre. His argument is based around a shared ability among scholars of different faculties to express themselves in a uniquely standardised way (Hyland 2011b). In conclusion, the genre-based analysis of EAP, through the usage of interdisciplinary and multi-modal approaches, manages to cover a variety of research fields. It should also be noted that the nature of this approach is usable beyond studies of EAP and contributes to other fields such as sociology or psychology.

2.2. Investigation of EAP in a social context

This approach aims to study EAP in practical and social environments, yet the socially oriented studies of EAP vary in focus. On one hand, researchers such as Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) frame academic discourse as a rite of linguistic initiation and treat the mastery of the academic language as a step to further students' socialisation into a disciplinary community. On the other hand, later studies aim to investigate the discursive power dynamic of EAP usage in the academic community. For example, Hasrati and Street (2009) base their assumption about the unequal nature of EAP usage on their examination of student-supervisor interviews, whereas Lillis (2002, 2008) examines differences in students' social background and how it correlates to their understanding and stance towards EAP. In both cases, students who efficiently operate within the academic discourse proved to be more assertive and knowledgeable when talking to their superiors. The power dynamic of EAP proficiency allowed supervisors to possess a tighter grasp on the decision-making process of their students, due to the psycholinguistic perception of EAP as professional, serious and verbose (Hasrati & Street 2009; Charles 2013). There is also some evidence that an underlying effect of the discrepancy in EAP proficiency further affects students' engagement and motivation (Pecoraro 2008; Hyland 2009).

2.3. EAP in language identity studies

Alternatively, the investigation of EAP in social context may be also used in research of communities and cultures with a history of independent academia who have just recently switched into English as a result of globalisation. The result of the dominating status of English in the academic environment goes further than the creation of a system facilitating categorisation and spread of knowledge. In many cases, the hegemony of English resulted in marginalisation

of academic writers based on EAP proficiency (Swales 1997). Another impact of English dominance can be seen in a general preference of sources and references written in English (Charles 2013). Interestingly, research conducted on this particular phenomenon is not solely concerned with the linguistic issue, but it rather ventures into the topic of possible circumstances and outcomes. The outcome-oriented aspect of this situation is well described by Flowerdew and Li (2009a, 2009b) as well as by Lillis and Curry (2010). In both studies it is claimed that the pressure to publish in English is likely to lead to a drop in diversity and quality of papers written by L2 EAP users. The key element here is understanding the significance of integrating EAP into the language identity of academics worldwide. A similar aspect can be observed in the previously mentioned areas of EAP researched by means of the contextual approach. The ability for non-native English-speaking academics to get successfully published is not just tied to their overall proficiency in EAP. Belcher (2009) observed a seeming lack of diversity in papers written by foreign academics in English and attributed it to the rhetorical and stylistic structure of the texts. Papers structured and styled in a manner reminiscent of the Anglo-Saxon standard tend to get better reviews, whereas culturally and linguistically grounded changes in style are met with criticism and are labelled as evidence of incompetence (Belcher 2009; Charles 2013).

The research findings mentioned above certainly lead to some questions about the relation between EAP education and the development of individual language and academic identities. A plethora of research has been conducted in an effort to investigate the process of constructing academic identities and the shaping of personal identities through extended academic education. As the above examples of EAP research outcomes indicate, the process of creating academic identities can be traced to the structure of academic life. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) declare that academic language proficiency serves as a form of assessment which determines students' engagement in disciplinary lives, thus allowing their teachers to decide whether a particular student is ready to advance to the next stages of their education or academic careers. Similarly, Mansourizadeh and Ahmad (2011) consider academic identity to be crucial in terms of developing academic writing skills. In their view, the ability to frame and project findings and results is not only influenced by general academic knowledge of a writer. Alternatively, it is the academic engagement and atonement that drive these abilities. Flowerdew and Wang (2015: 82) refer to this process as "identity transformation" and "academic acculturation". The idea of an academic influence on identity development of students and academics is based on the notion of transformability of discourse practices in a given community. Students and academics take specific discursive roles in an academic community. Besides there being certain rules of conduct, their roles impose

some specific and concrete linguistic requirements. The overall presence of EAP in academic education and science further cements its role as a core element in the functioning of the academic community and the development of academic identities (Flowerdew & Wang 2015).

One interesting aspect of EAP's influence on shaping individual identity can be observed while investigating online activities of academic writers and lecturers. Hyland (2011a, 2012) took a particular interest in homepages, blogs and online profiles of several active academic workers worldwide. In his studies, he discovers that for many academics and graduates the embracement of their academic identity correlates with their sense of credibility and belonging. Additionally, homepages are described as a discursively constructive factor in the development and growth as members of an institution or a community (Hyland 2011a, 2012). Furthermore, academic homepages provide a schematic template for academic identities to develop. Certain universal elements of these pages, such as their structure, language and focus on accomplishments and scientific interests provide a general understanding of academic identity for both beginners and seasoned academics. On the contrary, personal homepages and blogs reflect solely the individual traits of a person without a common factor or a shared image of identity. People with different homepages may share hobbies or traits, but structural elements such as linguistic or graphic frameworks of their pages make it difficult to create a potential schema to develop. Thus, the structural and communicative usage of EAP in academic homepages might be considered as both a building block for a shared academic identity and as a differentiating factor which allows academics to keep their personal and professional aspects of life intact and harmonic (Hyland 2011a, 2012). In addition, the standard created by the academic homepages prompts individuals outside of the academia to mimic this standard by using a schema similar in terms of structure and language. Finally, it may also be connected to the advancement of other identity-grounded homepages connected by a different domain of English for Specific Purposes.

To conclude, research into EAP goes further than investigating and categorising an ever-developing subdomain of English. The situation created by a global hegemony of English in the academia encompasses phenomena far removed from corpora studies. Genre-based research of EAP allows for a multimodal and contrastive study of EAP as a genre. On the other hand, the contextual research on EAP opens new opportunities to discuss the power dynamic related to the usage of EAP in university classrooms and in scientific publishing. Furthermore, both of these approaches and the qualitative overview of academic activity on the Internet point to the underlying relation between EAP proficiency and the development of language and social identity. As can be seen, the topic of EAP is truly multifaceted and abundant in terms of approaches, variables and areas to research.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present qualitative research can be divided into two parts. First, it investigates particular experiences and perspectives of foreign students in Poland and their learning of EAP as part of their academic curriculum. Second, the possible influence of these experiences on the process of shaping individual identities was also taken into consideration. The process of data analysis follows Grounded Theory as its primary methodological framework. Following the foundations given by Hadley (2017), it was decided that an approach based on an organic emergence of new concepts from the data could benefit the study due to the very complexity of the general topic. Both points of interest signalled above are equally represented in the research questions formulated in the project:

1. How influential is Academic English in shaping the identities of foreign students?
2. What factors affect the reception of Academic English among foreign students?
3. To what extent is Academic English part of foreign students' linguistic self-concept?
4. What role does Academic English play in the future careers of foreign students?

3.1. Instrumentation

The research technique employed in the study was an interview. According to Kvale (1996), an interview is an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. Such an interpretation emphasises the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and the social context (situatedness) of research data. Additionally, as Walford (2001: 90) declares, "interviewers and interviewees co-construct the interview", which points to the fact that it is not a naturally occurring event (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). Moreover, as a social encounter, it is essentially different from a typical everyday conversation due to a number of features (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007), including the fact that it has a specific purpose, the questions are asked by one person mainly (interviewer) and detailed responses and explicitness of answers are expected.

In the present research project, the interviews were semi-structured which means that the researcher relied on a pre-prepared list of questions, however they were occasionally modified, according to the specific requirements and changing circumstances of a particular interview. All three interviews took place online

in February 2022. The structured part of the recorded conversation contained 12 questions regarding participants' views and opinions on learning EAP, their future career prospects and their obtained academic proficiency in both their working and academic lives. Moreover, some of the questions were designed with the intention of prompting the participants to discuss the concept of identity and how learning different variations of English abroad impacted their very own self-concepts. Due to the semi-structured character of the interviews conducted within the study, each of them contained some non-planned questions which were meant to uphold both the conversation and the curiosity of the participants as well as to add some extra depth to their responses.

3.2. Participants

One important factor of the present study is the focus on the diversity of respondents taking part in the research process. Thanks to the Erasmus+ programme, similar institutions active at Adam Mickiewicz University and varied study options for international students, it has become possible to incorporate into investigation the ideas of internationalism and multilingualism as important aspects of identity and EAP research. In the present project, the research group consisted of three foreign students of applied linguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań who had chosen the full time MA programme in empirical linguistics and language documentation. Yet, it is worth underlining that they represented different cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and their future career plans or professional experience differed considerably. In each case, pseudonyms have been used in the research report in order to protect the privacy of the participants.

Participant 1

Haqiqi is a 29-year-old student of empirical linguistics and language documentation at the Institute of Applied Linguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She comes from Azerbaijan and currently works as an online English teacher. She is proficient in a variety of different languages. Besides speaking Azeri as her native language, she is also an advanced speaker of English, Russian and Turkish. Russian and English play an important role in her work and education, respectively.

Participant 2

The second participant is a 28-year-old student of applied linguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Amaji is originally from Palestine. Besides her

current background in empirical linguistics, she also studied *the English Language and Literature* as her bachelor course. As she is a freelance translator, English plays a crucial role in her daily life. However, it is also worth mentioning that Amaji's educational background in Europe helped her study other languages such as Romanian and Polish. Palestinian Arabic is her native language, but as she completed her rudimentary education in Palestine, she also speaks Modern Standard Arabic, which greatly influenced her views on literary standards, variants and domains in other languages.

Participant 3

The final participant, Aristocles, is a 23-year-old student of applied linguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He first came to Poland as a participant in the ERASMUS+ programme. Aristocles studied Greek philology in Greece where he developed his interest in linguistics, especially lexicology. Since then, Aristocles has travelled around Europe and has taken part in different programmes and courses. He speaks English at an advanced level as it is his primary language of education and work. Currently, he is also learning Polish.

4. RESULTS

For the purpose of data analysis, a schema consisting of four distinct categories related to the subject of the study was created. The first category relates to the influence of Academic English on the process of reshaping or shaping new identities among foreign students. In the second section of the schema, possible factors affecting the students' reception of Academic English were collected and examined. The topic of Academic English as part of students' self-concept (the notion that in a way combines personal and social identity) was investigated as the third category within the schema. Last but not least, the role of Academic English in the future career prospects of the students makes up the final point of data analysis. In order to properly analyse individual interpretations or ideas found in the responses, each participant's answer was analysed separately.

4.1. EAP's influence on shaping identity

The overall perspective of the respondents on identity is that it is a notion largely related to the cultural, personal and linguistic development of a person. It could be observed that the students raised in a multilingual setting see the possibility of developing multiple identities quite clearly. On the other hand, the

students whose development was affected by one foreign language, primarily English, view their identity as one entity that is influenced by outside factors, rather than developing and differentiating between several identities.

Furthermore, the impact of learning EAP is more noticeable among students whose linguistic background is more diverse. The first two participants were able to clearly define the boundary between the influence of learning English in general and learning a specific domain of English. The influence of Academic English on the respondents' identities can be observed in two areas:

- 1) The process of developing a personality built to communicate in a complex and sophisticated context (for example, discussing literature, language or politics).
- 2) The context of creating a professional *persona* suited to their future field of work as teachers, translators or academic employees.

The specific opinions of the interviewees are presented in the table below:

Table 1. The influence of EAP on the process of shaping identity

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Identity is related to language, culture and values such as politeness, honesty or being direct	Identity is explained as a <i>person you are, both actively and passively</i>	Identity is described as a set of personal, cultural and societal characteristics that each person develops over time
Learning new languages creates opportunities for new identities to develop or old identities to alter, according to the saying "You are as many persons as the languages you speak"	She sees identity as both a type of behaviour or a state of mind consisting of culture, habits and linguistic traits	He believes people can have multiple identities based on a language they speak but stresses that it does not always occur
Speaking English or Russian makes her feel more expressive and liberal	The participant claims that learning English has allowed her to be more extraverted and active during conversations	While speaking English, the participant feels less extraverted and active, because he is unable to convey several aspects of his Greek identity, ex. humour.
EAP plays a significant role in her professional development, but in terms of her identity, overall culture of English is more influential	Learning EAP improved the quality and diversity of her language and invoked her willingness to discuss new topics	He believes that higher proficiency in English may resolve the issue of conveying humour and other aspects of identity
		Academic English is not seen as an influential factor in the process of shaping identity

Source: current study.

4.2. The reception of EAP among the students

The status of the academic language is quite consistent for all the respondents. EAP is viewed as a high-brow domain and mastering it confirms a high proficiency in English. The students appreciate the way in which learning EAP improved their vocabulary and helped them develop the specific style and skills needed to finish their degrees.

Table 2. The reception of EAP among students

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
<p>The participant views EAP as a standard academic practice.</p> <p>Academic English is an important domain in terms of developing high-level proficiency.</p> <p>According to the participant, EAP is considered a staple domain for teachers and researchers.</p>	<p>Academic English is viewed as a mean to improve one’s writing skills, especially in relation to essays and dissertations.</p> <p>The participant also claims that learning Academic English allows for a clearer understanding of statistical data, charts and graphs.</p>	<p>Proficiency in EAP is viewed as a crucial element of linguistic studies and future academic work.</p> <p>The participant recalls that learning and using Academic English can enrich one’s vocabulary and the quality of writing.</p>

Source: current study.

4.3. Academic English as an aspect of the students’ self-concept

The collected data referring to the participants’ self-concepts suggest that the students often exclude EAP from their ordinary usage of English and treat it more as an aspect of their public selves. As demonstrated in the previous section, the practical and professional aspects of EAP are appreciated by the students, yet in casual communication this type of language knowledge is discarded in favour of a general domain. One exception to this is using academic vernacular during serious discussions on complex topics which seems natural in certain situations.

Table 3. Academic English as an element of students’ self-concept

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
<p>The participant acknowledges EAP as an element of her professional self-concept.</p>	<p>The participant views Academic English as a possible part of one’s self-concept.</p>	<p>The participant does not see Academic English as a part of his own self-concept, but does not deny that it may influence self-concepts of others.</p>

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
<p>As a part-time teacher, she notices the EAP's positive influence on her choices in grammar and word use.</p> <p>In terms of developing skills and her teacher identity, Academic English played a significant role by improving her grammar, use of words and the ability to explain certain topics.</p> <p>EAP does not influence the day-to-day self-concept of the participant.</p>	<p>In her view, Academic English can be used outside of the academia. She emphasised that EAP is used by her and her friends in complex discussions.</p> <p>A similar approach about using EAP in written posts on social media was also expressed by the informant.</p> <p>EAP influenced the self-concept of the participant by improving her language skills, consciousness and attention to detail in casual and professional situations.</p>	<p>Learning EAP has certainly helped the informant to learn new vocabulary and improve his writing, yet he does not think that EAP constitutes a part of his self-concept.</p>

Source: current study.

4.4. Academic English in the students' future careers

The knowledge of the academic domain of English as well as practical skills acquired during EAP courses are greatly appreciated by the students. All the respondents claim that their future careers would at some point require them to use Academic English in order to further develop professionally or as part of their work.

Table 4. EAP's role in the students' future careers

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
<p>The informant sees EAP as an important element of her future career. As an aspiring teacher, she views learning Academic English as a mean to explain complex topics to her students. She would also like to teach Academic English alongside other domains to her future students.</p> <p>She claims that learning Academic English will help her improve her writing in terms of vocabulary choice and dealing with statistical data.</p>	<p>Academic English is viewed as an important factor in the future career of the respondent as a translator/interpreter specialising in many domains of English.</p> <p>One major benefit related to her future career is expanding her vocabulary.</p> <p>The participant is also adamant that with practice, she will be able to translate academic texts and literature</p>	<p>The participant acknowledges the importance of Academic English as a necessary part of an academic career.</p> <p>He remains sceptical of EAP's applicability in professions other than teaching and research.</p> <p>As an ambitious student who plans on conducting his own research projects, he is sure that proper use of Academic English will impact the quality and reception of his future work.</p>

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
The participant does not acknowledge the usefulness of EAP in other professions.		

Source: current study.

5. DISCUSSION

After a thorough analysis of the responses provided by the informants, the data collected in the present project can be summarised in the following way:

1. EAP is partly influential in the process of shaping identities and the students consider EAP to be vital in terms of developing their professional and academic personas. This result remains consistent with Flowerdew and Wang's (2015) findings. Academic atonement and engagement into the academic community drives students into adapting EAP into their identities and making it an important aspect of their social identity. In the case of academically oriented students (participant 3) it may help in establishing a specific academic identity. Interestingly, this process seems fully conscious and deliberate.
2. The way the students associate EAP with particular competencies remains consistent with the results provided by Hyland (1997) and Evans and Green (2007). The respondents highlight the importance of learning EAP as a natural step in attaining a high proficiency in English. Moreover, the students believe that EAP can be particularly effective in improving their vocabulary and syntax, as well as writing and statistical competencies.
3. Self-concept might be viewed as difficult to interpret by the students. While they acknowledge the possibility of EAP influencing their self-categorisation, they do not see EAP as a concrete aspect of their image. Proficiency in EAP and other domains is viewed mostly as a practical skill. However, it is also seen as helpful in pursuing academic achievements which is consistent with Marsh and Martin's (2011) findings. Furthermore, the respondents' attitude towards EAP is reflected in their reliance on this variety of language in achieving their individual goals which also implies that it is an impactful aspect of their self-concept. In one case, EAP is thought to contribute to improving the participant's teaching skills and in the case of another participant his abilities as a researcher. Thus, in both situations it influences the student's professional identity.

4. As observed by Hyland (2018), EAP plays a significant role in the education of career-oriented students, regardless of their chosen profession. At first sight it may seem that EAP is used mainly in academic writing. However, the study participants agree that EAP courses helped them develop core skills related not only to writing, but also to analysing statistical data and teaching. While the present study focused on the students whose future careers involve extensive language use and teaching, it can be assumed that their views would be similar if their chosen professions were not so strongly connected with the practical use of English.

6. FINAL CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the significant position of English in the Academia worldwide, EAP has become the definite domain of international academic discourse and this domination is clearly noticeable in the context of EAP-related research. Thus, the empirical part of the present study aimed to investigate an area of particular interest in times of an ever-growing presence of EAP in the academic lives of students. After conducting three interviews with foreign students, whose status as multilinguals in a Polish-speaking environment already proved to be challenging and confusing, it became apparent that exposure to Academic English can be viewed as a difficult, yet vital and edifying factor of their education. Interestingly, the students consider EAP as a detached domain of English spanning its own culture and range. Moreover, it has been noted that proficiency in EAP is seen as a measurement of one's overall competence in the English language. The respondents agreed that this variation of English has to some extent influenced the (re)shaping of their individual identities. However, learning EAP proved to be a minimal factor in the whole process. The most influential factor that relates to the level of proficiency in Academic English is connected with the students' self-concepts, especially in regard to how they imagine their public selves or, more specifically, their future "career-selves". According to the interviewees, the most prevalent function of EAP in their academic lives was helping them develop and improve core skills related to both academic and overall writing competence, analysing data, as well as discussing and explaining complex or abstract topics.

There are two main limitations to this study worth addressing. Firstly, it has to be acknowledged that the number and diversity of the respondents may seem inadequate. Due to time restraints, among other miscellaneous problems, only a small group of students participated in the research, yet it had been originally planned as a pilot study potentially helpful in designing a similar

but larger-scale research project. In the case of a follow-up or proper study, the participatory body would be considerably extended and an effort to interview foreign students from other faculties around Poland would be made. Secondly, the study would certainly benefit from a secondary research tool that would allow for exploring students' English-speaking identities in a predominantly Polish-speaking environment. It is believed that such a solution would increase the quality of the empirical part of the study by providing triangulation, more depth and detailed focus to the data collected.

One interesting observation made during the process of data analysis is that students' attitude towards learning English for Academic Purposes and other domains of English is strongly related to their future career prospects. Certainly, it should be the aim of future research to further investigate this relation from a psycholinguistic perspective. Another topic worth further examination is related to the practical side of learning EAP and other domains of English. The respondents declared that EAP courses allowed them to master skills that may be potentially useful both in their academic work as well as in other professions. Thus, from a strictly educational perspective, the topic of utilising domain specific courses to teach students holistic skills needed in various careers seems at least worth exploring.

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