Introduction

Exploring Options in Academic Writing is designed to help student writers develop their knowledge and use of academic language to meet demands of college- and university-level writing assignments. It draws on the research identifying lexical and grammatical patterns across academic contexts and provides authentic reading contexts for structured vocabulary learning. Recognizing that vocabulary choices in writing often require consideration of grammatical structure, ***Exploring Options*** focuses on specific kinds of lexico-grammatical decisions—that is, ones involving the interaction of vocabulary and grammar—that student writers face in shaping, connecting, and restructuring their ideas. It also helps writers learn how to effectively use resources such as learner dictionaries and concordancers to develop their academic word knowledge.

Rather than being structured as a series of academic word lists or selected grammatical features that students need to master, this book integrates instruction in vocabulary and grammar by considering the goals that all writers must pay attention to in producing effective academic discourse. Such goals include choosing words that "fit" their writing contexts not only in meaning (semantically), but also in relationship to the grammar of phrases or clauses and in the level of formality required; they also involve showing relationships between ideas within sentences, creating connections across sentence boundaries through a variety of appropriate cohesive devices, expressing writer stance, or referencing source materials accurately and effectively.

To assist students in achieving these goals, each chapter of ***Exploring Options in Academic Writing*** provides scaffolded instruction that will help students check their current lexico-grammatical

knowledge and build on that knowledge by using available resources and engaging in guided text analysis and production tasks.

Exploring Options has these specific objectives:

1. to make students aware of paper and online resources for developing academic language proficiency and ways to use these resources effectively

2. to provide guided practice in strategies for crafting lexico-grammatical structures needed for academic writing

3. to familiarize students with vocabulary used for particular academic discourse functions, such as showing relationships between ideas, expressing stance, focusing information, and creating cohesion.

Recent research reveals the complexity of academic language learning and the need to integrate grammar and vocabulary in language instruction. The activities in this book are based on a synthesis of current research that responds to two overarching questions:

What Do Students Need to Know about a Word to Use It Correctly in Their Writing?

The development of active vocabulary involves more than the mere knowledge of a word's meaning. Writers have to control the use of a word in their writing: denotations, connotations, collocations, grammatical characteristics/context, register/level of formality, frequency of use, and word forms/derivatives (Nation, 2001).

What Types of Language Structures Are Used Most Frequently in Academic Writing?

Much of this book examines the ways in which the choice of vocabulary drives the use of grammar. Corpus linguistics in particular, which identifies how language is used across registers and genres, has produced a wealth of new information about lexico-grammatical patterns (Biber, 2006; Biber et al., 1999; Hinkel, 2002) and is now

available through dictionaries, concordancers, and other resources. Corpus and functional linguistics analyses also highlight common grammatical features of academic writing that differ from those used in spoken contexts and thus, we believe, should form the focus of academic writing courses. Some features that tend to be used with high frequency in academic writing that are practiced in this text are:

- complex sentence structures

- noun phrases, nominalizations, abstract nouns, and signaling or classifier nouns, such as *the development of written work appropriate for university assignments*

- cohesive devices, as in these phrases: *given these criteria* and *despite such requirements*

- hedging devices to express stance, as in this sentence: *Students tend to* / *often rely on the language characteristics of speech*.

Structure within Chapters

Following the introductory chapter of **Exploring Options,** most of the chapters include two sections: Raising Language Awareness and Building Your Knowledge.

Raising Language Awareness

This section provides an introduction to features of the target structures or writing subskills and gives students opportunities to identify their current level of exposure and understanding.

Building Your Knowledge

This section, the main part of each chapter, offers explanations about various aspects of the targeted vocabulary or structure that seem most relevant and challenging for student writers. These features have been selected partly on the basis of observations on how the targeted vocabulary is used in academic writing, including analysis of

vocabulary in corpus-based resources. We have also selected them drawing from our experience working with students and their texts.

Numerous guided activities in this section help students gain awareness of the range of lexico-grammatical options and develop strategies for implementing them effectively in their own writing. Expanding on what it means to know a word as outlined and explained in Chapter 1, the explanations and activities in Building Your Knowledge offer exposure to many aspects of vocabulary knowledge that go beyond just knowing word meanings.

The activities in Building Your Knowledge represent a range of complexity and types, including **text analysis, practice selecting and using structures in authentic and constructed texts,** and **error analysis and editing practice.**

References

Biber, D. (2006). *University language: A corpus-based study of spoken and written registers.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Biber, D., S. Johansson, G. Leech, S. Conrad, & E. Finegan. (1999). *The Longman grammar of spoken and written English.* London: Longman.

Hinkel, E. (2002). *Second language writers' text: Linguistic and rhetorical features.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language.* Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.