First Experiences with Academic Writing: Difficulties in Meeting Genre Requirements

Or

First Experiences with Academic Writing: Linguistic Difficulties

As of October 2012, one of the components of the psychometric exam is essay writing. For this reason, many students have their first experience with academic writing while preparing for the psychometric exam. This initial experience is characterized by clear difficulties in adapting their writing outcomes to the linguistic requirements of the genre. These difficulties are manifest in two main areas. First, many students find it difficult to adapt to the process of writing conventional academic texts. One of the most prominent manifestations of this difficulty is the large number of errors stemming from an attempt to use a “higher” linguistic style. Such errors include contradictions and inaccuracies in the realms of semantics and lexicon. Second, many students find it difficult to accurately use transitional words and discourse organizers. They tend to embed transitional words automatically, using a rigid format that is inappropriate for their specific text.

The basis of this presentation is a comparison of fifty essays written by high school students with fifty essays by students preparing for the psychometric exam. Additionally, approximately four thousand essays written for the psychometric exam were assessed, and examples drawn from these are given in this presentation. My first finding is that the essays written by students preparing for the psychometric exam are characterized by a higher number of errors of the two types presented above, in comparison to the essays written by high school students. Following this, I assess possible causes underlying these errors in essays by students preparing for the psychometric exam. In conclusion, I offer practical ways to address their difficulties.