

A decorative graphic of stylized, overlapping leaves in a light purple color, located on the left side of the slide.

# Real or ideal?

**What to do when authentic  
usage looks wrong**

# Everybody here is committed to authenticity!

Topics for today include:

- identifying and describing authentic academic genres
- working with authentic texts
- creating authentic tasks, assessments and learning contexts
- increasing authenticity through collaboration with departments



**No need to talk about the benefits  
So I'll go a little bit against the tide.....**



**Is what is authentic necessarily  
what is most effective?**

**Can we improve on the authentic –  
to the benefit of international  
students, academic disciplines, the  
language?**

# **Two reasons why we might reject what is authentic**

- 1. Actual practice is so different from what we expect that we can't accept it as 'true'.**
- 2. We recognise an authentic practice, but we don't want to encourage it.**

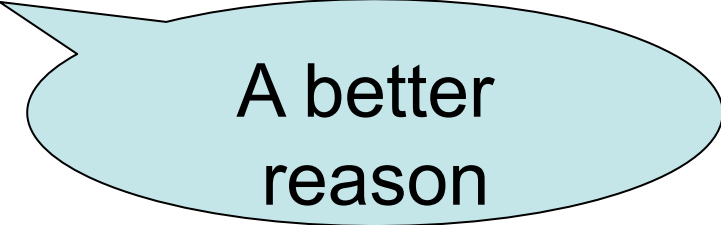
# Two reasons why we might reject what is authentic

1. Actual practice is so different from what we expect that we can't accept it as 'true'.



Not a good reason

2. We recognise an authentic practice, but we don't want to encourage it.



A better reason

# An example from Business English

Hi Rob,

How are you? Hope you well and smiling.

Rob, How's your design going?

Hope it goes very smoothly, hehe.....

I'm very looking forward to seeing your talented designs.

Kindest regards,

Sally

(Liang Liao, private corpus of ELF email correspondence)

# **Business English textbooks and authenticity**

Marion Williams (1988) compared what people actually said in business meetings with what was taught in textbooks.....



# Of course, the authentic meetings

- ....contained a large number of unfinished sentences, false starts, overlapping utterances, interruptions and fillers such as *urn*, *er*, and *you know*. A large proportion .....contained comments, jokes, quips, repetitions, and asides. Some of the sentences were not grammatically correct.

(Williams1988: 49)

But also

There was virtually no  
correspondence between the  
functional exponents taught in the  
course books and the forms  
actually used in the meetings.

In the real meetings, overtly polite forms were not generally used.



In the textbooks, extremely polite forms were explicit, and were often taught.

# In the real meetings, speakers were blunt

- *what a load of crap;*
- *bugger around like we usually do*
- *oh no (+ groans etc.)*
- *seems a .....idea (e.g. barmy).*

But this was acceptable to participants because of the accompanying facework strategies – preparators, grounders etc.

# The textbooks should teach facework

But should they also teach the 'blunt'  
language of proficient speakers?

# The same goes for seminar participation

- EAP materials teach forms that are rarely found in authentic student seminar talk.
- They are inauthentic, but does this matter?

## Leicester University 'Contributing to seminars and tutorials'

**Keeping the discussion on course** - *"Haven't we moved away from the point that Manjit was making about ...?"*

**Presenting alternative views –**  
*"But doesn't that contradict with...?"*

**Showing involvement** - *"I think we need to look more closely at the impact of..."*



Is that such a good idea?

I'd like to say something if I may...

I was wondering if you could tell me...

I can't really go along with you on that...

Okay, but what about the other argument we haven't considered yet...

I'd tend to agree with you on that point

Could you just repeat that point again please?

But don't you see, we have to do that, otherwise...

What about doing it in a different way?

Maybe that's true, but...

As I see it, it would be better if....

That would be great, except...

Anyway, if we could just turn to X, ....



In the seminar component of the BASE corpus (427,282 words) these expressions are rarely used by students

Students don't say:

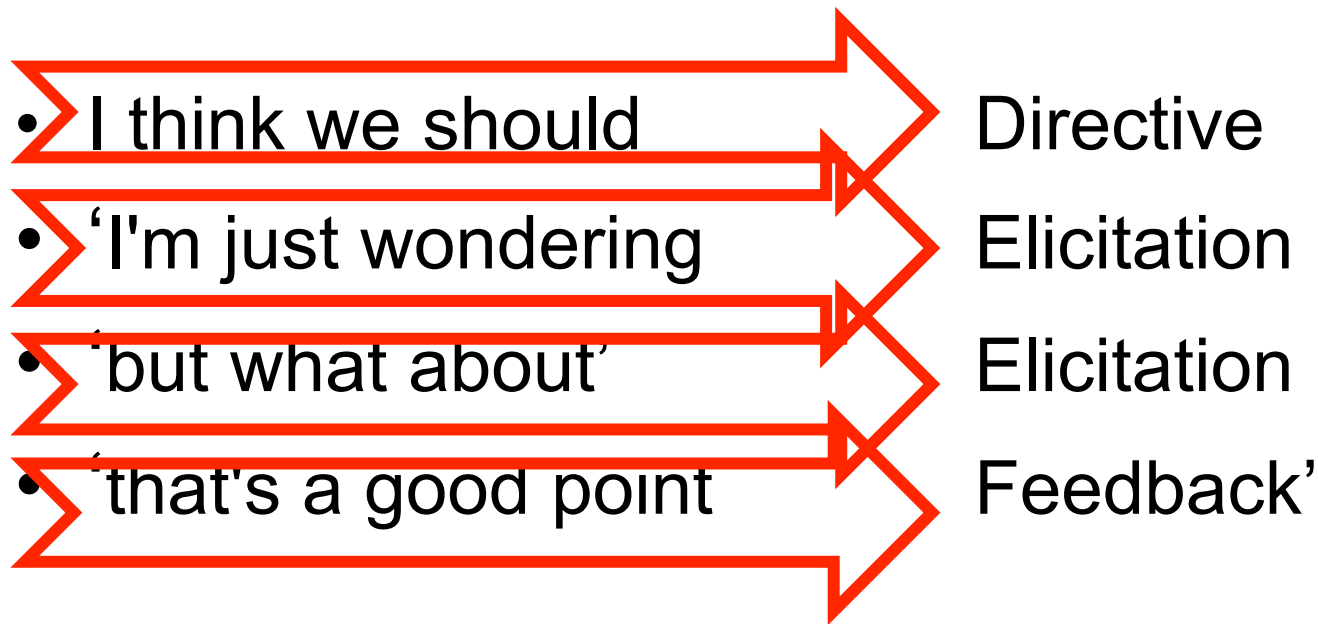
- 'Please'
- 'If I may'
- 'I can't... go along with you'
- 'I tend to agree / disagree'

This is teacher talk!

# Seminar tutors, not students, say:

- I think we should
- I'm just wondering
- but what about
- that's a good point

# All components of moves in the traditional IRF teaching exchange



But maybe students should be  
talking more like their tutors?

And, as in the ELF email  
correspondence, some 'inauthentic' forms  
are very charming.

# What about academic writing?

Are there some authentic features we don't wish to encourage?



## From a government website that outlines the grammar and punctuation test for Key Stage 2

“This document provides an initial technical evaluation of the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test, including information relating to Ofqual’s common assessment criteria. It does not contain specific information about test questions, **however** it details how the test and its framework was developed.”

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/assessment/keystage2/b00208296/ks2-2014/grammar-punctuation-spelling-test>

[mailto:baalmail-bounces@lists.leeds.ac.uk] On  
Behalf Of Alison Sealey  
Sent: 25 October 2013 11:45  
To: baalmail@lists.leeds.ac.uk  
Subject: [Baalmail] 'however'

Is 'however' a conjunction?

I'm not a hardline prescriptivist, but I do retain a few of the 'rules' that I continue to 'correct' when students flout them in their academic writing. I still tell them that 'however' is not a conjunction and that 'but' is often 'better' .....

Shall I just give up and start telling students that 'however' is indeed an alternative to 'but'?

Alison

Alison's message immediately  
provoked 15 responses.....



The fact that we can place 'however' in the positions permitted to conjunctive adverbs and that we can't do the same with 'but' suggests that we have to maintain the distinction with students of grammar even if the punctuation issue may be a lost cause.  
(Tom Bloor)

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Students I've spoken to get told at school not to use 'but' so they substitute 'however' assuming they can use it in the same way to link sentences. I think you owe it to your students to alert them to the negative impact this makes on an audience. (Olwyn Alexander)

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I suspect we are fighting a losing battle against a tide of linguistic evolution, but, until the tide is strong enough to remove the negative impression that Olwyn mentioned, I think anyone involved in raising students' awareness of language should keep up the fight. (Geoff Thompson)

# Is the meaning of *however* changing?

Some evidence in the BAWE corpus, e.g.

A large amount of correlation was seen for results for 50mm and 65mm, **however** this correlation decreased vastly for further away walls.

The patients symptoms arise from drinking too much alcohol, **however** the circumstances which lead this patient to drinking are key to his management.

**Even more radically,  
perhaps whole areas of  
academic English are  
losing their communicative  
effectiveness?**

*Learn to Write Badly:  
How to succeed in the social sciences*

Billig (2013) criticizes three (interrelated) features of current writing in the social sciences:

- Obfuscating jargon
- Nominalisation, and the over-use of nouns
- Over-use of passive constructions

# Billig's thesis

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If they are to succeed, students have to adopt the language of the approach regardless of its communicative failures – everyone is caught in the system, nobody dares to escape.

# See how student writing develops in the BAWE corpus

<b>Level</b>	<b>Involved</b>	<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Elaborated</b>	<b>Abstract and Impersonal</b>
<b>1</b>	-12.7	-2.7	5.1	5.9
<b>2</b>	-13.9	-2.8	5.6	6.2
<b>3</b>	-14.7	-3.0	5.7	6.4

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## Involvement

<b>1</b>	<b>-12.7</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>-13.9</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>-14.7</b>

i.e. it becomes less and less like conversation  
(fewer 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns, fewer  
present tense verbs and 'private' verbs of  
thinking, feeling, imagining)

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<b>Narrative</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>-2.7</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>-2.8</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>-3.0</b>

i.e. it becomes less and less like narrative  
(fewer past tense verbs and third person  
personal pronouns)

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## Abstract and Impersonal

<b>1</b>	<b>5.9</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>6.2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>6.4</b>

i.e. it contains more passive constructions, conjuncts such as *thus* and *however*, and adverbial and postnominal clauses.

# Nouns and passives in the social sciences

Nouns per mill. words

- Year 1 - 39,390
- Year 2 - 51,559
- Year 3 - 50,219
- Year 4 - 82,097

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## Passives per mill.words

- Year 1 - 546
- Year 2 - 756
- Year 3 - 763
- Year 4 - 1,069

# I had thought that this indicated progress!

But Billig argues that (in the social sciences) it indicates that the students have 'learnt to write badly'.

- 'when it comes to describing human actions, this way of writing is far more imprecise and contains far less information than simpler, ordinary language'
- 'clauses contain more information about social actions than ....nouns do'

<http://cup.linguistlist.org/2013/05/do-we-learn-to-write-badly-in-the-social-sciences/>



# The writing of a sociology student, Year 3

It shall presently be argued that the deficiencies of their approaches can be traced back to their ontological underpinnings. Both views will be explicated and then subjected to a realist critique, whilst the morphogenetic approach will be used to show that the substantive problems identified by Mills and Parsons are worthy of investigation.....

# The EAP practitioner – here to serve?

- The disciplines want students to conform to disciplinary norms
- Students want to succeed in their discipline
- Do we want to critique the system?

‘If we want to understand, resist and maybe change how people are doing things in the academic world and elsewhere, then we will have to dream that we can do things differently’

(Billig 2013:94)

THE END

# References

Billig, M. (2013) *Learn to Write Badly: How to succeed in the social sciences*. Cambridge University Press

Williams, M. (1988) Language taught for meetings and language used in meetings: is there anything in common? *Applied Linguistics* 9 (1) 45-58