Academic Literacy at a European university: Undergraduate students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English as a Second Language at the University of Groningen, in the Netherlands.

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June 30, 2010
This study described the perceptions that BA undergraduate students enrolled for a bilingually taught minor course in Applied Linguistics, had on the use of EAP at the University of Groningen. The students were taught the minor course in Dutch but had one lecture that was instructed in English, were expected to read a book and articles written in English as well write an assignment in English. Questionnaires, language learning histories (LLHs) and a confirmation interview were used for data collection. A questionnaire containing both open and closed questions was designed to gain insights into the situation. Questionnaires from 23 students were analyzed using needs analysis and the sociocultural approach. In order to add a further layer of understanding to the issues raised in the questionnaires, four LLHs were chosen for analysis based on a needs analysis done to each student’s open ended responses to Questions 1 and 9, of the questionnaire, which asked if the students enjoyed reading academic texts and writing assignments in English, respectively. The four LLHs, of the students who also chose the response “not at all” in the closed parts of questions 1 and 9, were analyzed using codes from needs analysis. It was found that students were insecure with the use EAP at university level as they cited lack of exposure and experience in using English for academic purposes.
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God for giving me the strength to write and finish my thesis on time. I am greatly indebted to my supervisor Dr. H. Hacquebord for being so supportive and having faith in this study, from the beginning to the end. Many thanks also go to Dr B.J. Haines who was also my mentor and source of inspiration.

I am very grateful to my late mother, Catherine Makombore, for her unwavering support for my passion to study. I would not forget to thank my 2009-2010 MA-TEFL classmates for their moral support.
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1. CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This study falls under the broad area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). According to Griva (2009) the emergence of ESP as a discipline in the 20th century resulted from the quest for teachers to meet learner needs and wants, whenever possible, so as to foster students’ linguistic development. Focusing on the demands of the learner enabled teachers to identify what exactly the learners needed to know in order for them to be able to use English for specific purposes. Griva (2009) mentions that as ESP evolved over the years, it was eventually used as an umbrella term for sub-divisions such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The current study will focus on EAP. The word “academic” in this context, refers to education designed for students who intend to study at a college or university after high school. This chapter begins by giving a general overview of the discipline of EAP and puts the forthcoming study, of how students who are used to receiving instruction in languages other than English perceive academic literacy in English at the University of Groningen, into context.

In general, the study of EAP seeks to examine how students use language to effectively meet the requirements of academia (Grabe, 2000). To be precise, the undergraduate students involved in this current study majored in different languages of the world (such as Spanish, French, Italian and English etcetera) but used Dutch as the main medium of instruction for a minor course that was offered by the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Groningen, in the Netherlands. Although the second year undergraduate students received instruction for the minor course in Dutch, they had one
lecture given in English, were required to read one book and articles that were written in English, as well as write an essay in English. The minor course from Applied Linguistics was ideal for this current study since Applied Linguistics is a discipline which regards proficiency in the English language as a significant factor in students’ academic success. One of the objectives of most EAP courses from Applied Linguistics is to equip students with effective academic literacy skills. Thus, this discipline’s emphasis on academic literacy in English made it a fertile ground for the investigation of students’ perceptions of using EAP, at tertiary level.

It is crucial to note that the University of Groningen is not officially labelled as a university which uses bi-lingual methods of instruction. However, the gradual inclusion of English as a method of instruction in the Dutch/English taught minor course from Applied Linguistics results from one of the objectives of the minor course, which is to foster effective learning through the use of EAP. Precisely, the course is taught in Dutch except for one lecture which is taught in English by a guest lecturer. The students are required to read one text book and articles that are written in English, as well as write an English assignment about their Language Learning Histories (LLHs). The inclusion of English as a method of instruction and assessment in the minor course signifies a developmental process towards a more structured bilingual approach to tertiary education. In this study, the minor course is consequently going to be referred to as bilingually taught.
Over the last two centuries, the growing presence of international students at universities has caused institutions to face more linguistic diversity in the total student population. An enquiry of student perceptions of academic literacy in the English language is critical especially at universities where there is linguistic diversity and as a consequence English sometimes being the medium of instruction. Since English is a second language to most Dutch as well as international students, it is paramount that the students know how to effectively read and write in the English language, if they are to pass a Dutch/English taught minor course such as the one offered by the University of Groningen’s Applied Linguistics department.

In this study, academic literacy is considered to be part of a discipline’s discourse practises. Thus, the term discourse, which is usually used with a wide range of meanings (Fairclough: 1992, Stubbs: 1996), will be taken, in this context, to refer to the use of EAP within the Faculty of Arts domain, in particular the Department of Applied Linguistics, at University of Groningen. The researcher has to specify academic discourse in this context because “discourse” in academic circles varies over countries, universities, disciplines and people (Paxton: 1998). Mastering a discourse tallies with mastering its literacy practices, which are understood as incorporating all the social practices of a particular group, from the way the group thinks, interacts and believes, to the way it reads and writes (Paxton: 1998). Through the administration of questionnaires reflecting on the use of EAP, the current study sought to quantitatively investigate students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English considering the fact that the students in question had been receiving instruction for a larger part of their academic lives, in minority languages such
as Dutch, Spanish and French therefore rendering them vulnerable to academic literacy complications whenever they had to use EAP.

The current study is not only concerned with students’ perceptions of academic literacy in isolation, but among other issues also tries to find out the possible reasons leading to the perceptions gathered. Such an enquiry is made possible by reflecting on the students’ Language Learning Histories (LLHs). Goodson (1995) defines LLH as a narrative configuration in qualitative analysis which represents stories of action within theories of context. LLHs link the students’ linguistic and academic literacy development with their current perceptions of academic literacy in English thereby facilitating the realisation of a “cause and effect” relationship between the students’ language learning experiences and their current perceptions of studying in English at university level. Apart from facilitating an investigation of the existence of a causative relationship between the students’ language learning experiences and their current perceptions of academic literacy in English, LLHs are also considered a necessary supplement as they add a further layer of understanding to the issues localised in the questionnaires.

An examination of the student’s linguistic and academic literacy development from their formative years up to the years leading to university is also done in order to elicit personal information from the students regarding their individual characteristics, language attitudes and resolutions of studying in English after graduation from university, considering their limited experiences with the use of EAP. The study aims to show how students can contribute to their own literacy development by reflecting on their linguistic
and academic literacy needs over the years. Such reflections on leaner academic literacy needs facilitate the development of tailor-made as well as learner centred EAP curricula.

1.1.2 The assumption of the study

The assumption of this study is that since the BA undergraduate students involved in this study do not have much experience with using EAP due to receiving instruction in languages other than English, they are bound to face difficulties with academic literacy in English when it comes to reading one English book and articles recommended as reading material for the minor course in Applied Linguistics. One of the intentions of this study is to find out whether or not students’ lack of experience with using EAP impacts negatively on their current attitudes towards academic literacy in English. The difficulties with academic literacy in English which the students are thought to face are assumed to be premised on Kaplan’s (1988) and Wardhaugh’s (1970) strong and moderate versions of contrastive analysis respectively. Kaplan’s (1988) strong version of contrastive analysis states that students are likely to face problems with studying in the L2 if their L1 languages are different in structure from L2. Wardhaugh’s (1970) moderate version views similarities between L1 and L2 structures as a source of confusion for the students due to possible interference between the two languages. In this regard, the main research question pertinent to this study is; how do BA undergraduate students, who are used to receiving instruction in languages other than English, perceive academic literacy in English when studying a Dutch/English taught minor course?

1.2 L1 reading compared to reading in L2
Since this study investigates the use of EAP by undergraduate students who have English as their second language, it is important to find out how reading in L2 differs from reading in L1. Stern (1983) defines an L2 as a language that is acquired chronologically after one’s native language or first language (L1). Rumelhard (1977) mentions that reading in L1 and in L2 both involve the same elements such as the reader, the text and an interaction between the two. However, Singhal (1998) notes that although reading in L1 and reading in L2 have some common elements, the processes involved tend to differ greatly.

Singhal (1998) states that if second language readers are not familiar with the culturally based schemata of a particular discourse community whose texts are in L2, they are likely to face problems with reading and writing in the L2. Segalowitz (1986) takes it further by stating that if the syntactic structures of a reader’s L1 and L2 are very different, then an enormous amount of cognitive restructuring is required. This means that readers may take time to process unfamiliar syntactic structures and reading material written in L2 as compared to the time they take when reading material written in their L1. If readers have to pause frequently and think about what they are doing or if they have to stop and wrestle over the meaning of phrases, then their reading is not skilled. Grabe (1991) mentions that L1 readers already possess a lot of vocabulary and grammar knowledge about their L1 before they even know how to read which is different from L2 readers who do not have such a privilege. The similarities and differences between L1 reading and L2 reading above mentioned, put this current study which investigates the reading habits of students who are used to reading academic texts written in languages other than English preferably their L1s, into context. Undergraduate students’ L2 reading habits facilitate an
insightful enquiry into the cognitive and metacognitive processes that underlie L2 reading of discipline specific materials such as the English book and articles from the minor course in Applied Linguistics.

1.3 The role of L2 reading in the use of EAP.

Reading is a complex skill that is used to develop strong second language (L2) fluency (Grabe: 2002). Urquhart and Weir (1998: 2) state that reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information which is encoded in language form via the medium of print. However, Grabe (2002) mentions that such a simple definition of reading does not take us very far. She argues that complex skills and processes require more complex definitions though such definitions must still be informative. Grabe (2002) further mentions that, useful extended definitions of reading can be developed at two levels which include the purposes for reading and components of reading ability. By considering the key processes involved in reading comprehension, a yet more complete picture of the reading process is created (Grabe: 2002).

Academic reading is purposeful (Grabe: 2002). This form of functional reading is undertaken by the student in order to obtain the information necessary to tackle a specific problem. Thus, the emphasis is on developing the relevant skills that enable students to locate and process information quickly and efficiently. The relevant skills include:

- the ability to use an index
- the ability to use a table of contents
- the ability to use a dictionary
- the abilities to read through a text quickly to get the general meaning (skimming)
- the ability to identify specific information from a text (scanning)
In addition to readers familiarising themselves with the use of the three guidelines (index, table of contents and the dictionary) mentioned above, they would also need to make use of the skills of scanning or skimming when searching for information, particularly when using a dictionary or encyclopaedia, for example. The relevance of the use of cognitive skills such as skimming and scanning during L2 reading is supported by Grabe (2002) who mentions that students read for a variety of purposes which include: scanning, skimming, reading for general understanding and reading to learn among others. Grabe (2002) also talks about reading as search process, expeditious reading, reading to write, reading while writing, and so many other possibilities. Apart from reading academic texts, students also involve themselves in recreational reading whereby they read newspapers, magazines, novels and emails in their spare time (Gallick: 1999). However, the kind of approach they use to read English written entertainment articles is bound to differ from how they read English written academic texts. This is because all texts are written following certain conventions that are specific to each domain. In this regard, if students are not familiar with the discipline specific jargon or writing conventions used in the English materials that they read for the minor course, they are more or less likely to come across reading problems.

Li and Munby (1996) mention that students use different strategies of reading whenever they come across academic texts which require in-depth comprehension that is often associated with the requirement to perform identifiable cognitive and procedural educational assessment activities, such as taking a test or writing an essay. Nambiar (2005) notes that academic reading involves much more than identifying main points in a
text, it involves learners having to associate L2 reading with their own individual background knowledge in order to arrive at a suitable degree of understanding of the text. Nambiar (2005) mentions that at times learners may fail to connect the academic texts they read with their knowledge base (due to insufficient content schemata) and as a result resort to the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, something which they may not do when reading entertainment magazines.

Since this study seeks to find out students’ perceptions of the use of English in their academic community of practice, which in this case is Applied Linguistics. It hopes to examine whether or not second year undergraduate students who are used to receiving instruction in languages other than English, think they are aware of all the information which may be needed for them to effectively participate in a community of practice which has one lecture that is presented in English by a guest lecturer, and a book and articles which need to be read in English. Kennedy (2001) mentions that if individuals wish to enter the professional communities represented by the domains they study in, they will need access to both the knowledge and skills of the profession and the language and discourse through which those skills and knowledge are communicated.

1.4 Reading strategies associated the use of EAP.

Reading strategies are defined by Grabe (2000) as specific-oriented actions or techniques that can either be conscious, unconscious or automatic. This study seeks to find out the strategies that students employ when they find a text written in English difficult. Omalley and Chamot (1990) conducted a series of studies on reading strategies and in their findings managed to group them under three broad headings, which are cognitive,
metacognitive and social affective strategies. Cognitive strategies involve scanning for specific information and skimming to get the general idea of a text (Grabe: 2002). As noted by Tei-Stewart (1985) metacognition refers to having knowledge, understanding control over the possessed knowledge, and the ability to use that knowledge appropriately. Thus, metacognitive strategies involve both the conscious awareness and the conscious control of one’s learning. Grabe (2002) notes that metacognitive readers tend to recognize when something does not make sense during L2 reading, this allows them to take appropriate action so as to facilitate effective comprehension.

1.5 The L2 reading model

Over the years, a lot of reading models have been put across by various reading researchers such as Adams: 1990, Crowder and Wagner, 1982, and Underwood and Batt, 1996 (Birch: 2002). Singer and Ruddell (1985) define a reading model as a graphic attempt to depict how an individual perceives a word, processes a clause, and comprehends a text.
Figure 1: Shows a hypothetical model of the L2 reading process which involves the use of processing strategies and the knowledge base (Birch: 2002)

As reflected in Figure: 1, L2 reading is considered to involve bi-directional processing strategies and knowledge base. Birch (2002), argues that a very simplified model of the L2 reading process includes storage for general and specific, world knowledge as well as language knowledge in long-term memory, what is referred to as the “knowledge base” (see Figure 1). Thus, when reading an academic text, the reader makes a bi-directional usage of his/ her prior knowledge of people, places, past events and activities to understand “language knowledge” which comes in the form of texts, sentences, phrases, words, letters and sounds.

Birch (2002) notes that the bi-directional use of both the reader’s world knowledge and language knowledge alone does not facilitate effective L2 reading as these two forms of
knowledge base can not interact directly with the text without some kind of processing mechanism. Birch (2002) asserts that a processing component definitely needs to supplement the knowledge base. This processing component consists of processing strategies such as cognitive processing strategies (such as inferencing, predicting and problem solving abilities among others) as well as language processing strategies (such as the L2 reader’s abilities to recognise letters, identify words and assess word meaning among others as shown in Figure 1). An observation of the L2 reading model reveals that L2 reading is a dynamic process which is characterized by interplay of the text with bi-directional processing strategies and a knowledge base consisting of world and language knowledge.

Grabe (2002) mentions that an authentic L2 reading model must recognize that a reader engages in an interactive process which consists of the use of both cognitive and metacognitive processes which can be at phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and discourse levels, including the use of the full range of linguistic knowledge bases. Grabe (2002) notes that fluent L2 readers are rapid and efficient word recognizers. To Grabe, word recognition is an important factor, amongst many, which can be used to measure reading ability. Fluent L2 readers do not guess upcoming words because their recognition skills are actually faster than those used to engage contextual information (Grabe: 2000). Grabe (2002), further mentions that fluent L2 readers predict, on a general level, upcoming information, have strong expectations about the discourse organization of the texts that they read, make adjustments to enhance comprehension and can carry out repairs to comprehension as needed.
Grabe (2000) postulates that good L2 readers can skim to get the general idea of a text as well as identify specific information in a text what he refers to as scanning. Grabe (2000) mentions that by processing a text, the reader negotiates an understanding of concepts through constant interaction between text structure, his/her world knowledge and cultural background. This qualifies L2 reading as an interactive process which involves constant dialogue between the reader and the text during the reading process (Grabe: 2000). The notion of reading as an interactive process is relevant to pedagogy as it tries to reveal the underlying processes that facilitate effective academic reading in English.

This section revealed the practical considerations of the L2 reading model with regards to reading at academic level. As noted by Grabe (2002), if teachers and curriculum developers are to help students make significant progress in reading instruction, they need to understand how the L2 reading process works. However, Grabe (2002) mentions that the L2 reading model only informs us about the reading process and about distinct issues for the L2 reader but does not really tell us how to teach reading, which might be one of its set backs. The best thing a teacher can do with the L2 reading model is to use aspects from it to draw a set of implications for instruction. Grabe (2002) comments that in addition to a strong knowledge base in reading, language teachers and instructors need to know how to connect implications from theory to real instructional practices when developing EAP curriculum so as to be able to successfully enhance students’ reading abilities.

1.6 Relationship between L2 reading and writing when using EAP.
L2 reading is a major element of the educational process from which it follows that a lack of ability to read, effectively increases the prospect of inefficient learning, which gives rise to below average attainment in all the learners’ endeavours, including writing. In retrospect, writing is defined by Oshima and Hogue (2006) as representing verbal language by a conventional system of graphic signs, with reading amounting to the reverse process where the signs are translated back into verbal language. Thus, it is evident that there is a vital link between language, the written word and reading itself. Writing as an L2 is also viewed by Grabe (1999) as skilled behaviour which has to be learned and needs to be fully developed. Such is L2 reading which is also seen by Grabe (1999) as a specialised language skill which in turn is the product of a cultured society.

Reading and writing skills do not occur in isolation from one another. Carson and Leki (1993) mention that reading, is the basis for writing. Flower (1990) highlights that academic papers are typically written in the context of a rich rhetorical situation that includes not only the conventions of academic discourse, but the expectations of the instructor, the context of the course, and the terms of the writing assignment. In this respect, university students are usually required to write their assignments based on the information they would have read from refereed published journals as well as text books. Thus, if students do not understand the language they read in, they are bound to face writing problems. Since reading is viewed as a key tool to be used in helping novices learn how to write academic discourse there is need to find out if BA second year undergraduate students taking the bilingual minor course in Applied Linguistics, face any reading problems whenever they read the English text book and English written articles
recommended as reading material for the minor course. Such an enquiry will foster the identification of students’ L2 reading habits, reading problems, the reading strategies they use as well as possible solutions to the problems identified.

The quality of a student’s academic writing in English can be significantly determined by how well they read academic texts in English (Hirvela : 2004). Since reading and writing go hand-in-hand in the EAP field, it is these two skills that will be addressed in this current study. The dependent relationship between the above mentioned skills is the reason why the term academic literacy is synonymously used to refer to both reading and writing skills.

Reading, therefore, is considered one of the most essential skills to possess if one wants to be successful in academia, and a large number of studies such as Lawson & Hogben (1998) have demonstrated a strong positive correlation between reading proficiency and academic success. Since academic literacy at university level is characterized by referencing published materials, it is essential to know what students who are not used to studying in English at tertiary level think about the language used in the academic texts they come across and how they cope with reading academic texts and writing an essay in English. Research on reading and writing strategies enables us to find out what students do whenever they do not understand academic texts written in English or can not locate certain English words when writing essays in English. It also allows students to highlight their academic literacy needs so that ways of addressing these needs can actually be provided through an EAP curriculum. Thus, this study can be helpful in the development
of teaching material for courses such as English for Academic Purposes, in which students can be taught about the most appropriate and effective reading strategies and writing styles which are relevant for use in academic domain like the minor course in Applied Linguistics where the use of English is also considered as a learning method.

1.7 Writing academic assignments in English

Over the years much has been written about academic literacies and the power they have to act as gatekeepers, to maintain the status quo at tertiary institutions by allowing in only those who can use discourse appropriately. Prior to entering university, most universities such as University of Groningen require international students to have passed certain approved language assessment tests such as TESOL and IELTS, among others, in order to be accepted for admission for any undergraduate programme. Dutch students are required to have passed the Schriftelijk eindexamen VWO. Despite the use of such language assessment criteria to screen students who enter university, studying in English at institutions of higher learning still remains tough for some students whose native language is not English. In the context of this current study, this may be probably as a result of the fact that English proficiency tests such as the Dutch Schriftelijk eindexamen VWO (which twenty-two participants in this study possess except one) do not test on students’ abilities to use metacognitive skills which are necessary when reading academic texts, but instead test their English language proficiency in general.

Miller (1994) mentions that upon entering university it is expected by most faculties, that students read academic texts as well as present written essays which follow certain norms that are socially defined and accepted in academia as a fulfilment of their course
requirements. This means that for undergraduate students to be able to prosper in their studies, they need to know how to read English written academic texts effectively as well as be aware of the conventions used in English academic writing. Since, the texts which students are asked to write in universities are meant to test them for content knowledge, there is need for them to be able to present their ideas in a systematic and standardized manner stipulated by their academic communities of practice, which in this case is Applied Linguistics.

The study of student perceptions of reading and writing in English, in the academic domain, also brought the need to find out student’s perspectives of writing as a social action realized in essays and some textual features of academic essay genre (Miller: 1994). In this regard, an enquiry is also going to be made to find out whether or not students just write essays in English for the sake of fulfilling their course requirements as a result of their limited experiences with using EAP. In this regard, this study also seeks to explore the concept of academic discourse communities with the aim of describing the relationship between academic writing in English and communication as being a mutual understanding between members of an academic community of practice.

It is important to note that language is more crucial in some communities of practice as compared to other disciplines. This current study is interested in students taking the minor course in Applied Linguistics as the discipline of Applied Linguistics is concerned with how languages such as English are used to facilitate effective learning at university level. Linguistics as a discipline deals with the scientific study of language (Crystal,
1999) but Applied Linguistics seeks to find theoretically based solutions to language related problems. For some faculties or disciplines, apart from English and Linguistics, it appears that language is not a significant factor to determine students’ academic success (Webb et al: 2002). Webb (2002 et al:168) state that faculties of engineering and medicine, and students of natural and biological sciences communicate through diagrams, symbols or formulae, and that language therefore has very little significance in their training programmes. Thus, there is a possibility of academic literacy being undermined in these areas of study. Paxton (1998) also confirms that there is a difference in language use and dependence amongst disciplines. Paxton (1998) makes reference to the field of economics which is a discipline known for its abstract language which does not often give its students the contextual cues they need for decoding the discourse. It is because of the prominence that disciplines such as Applied Linguistics give to the use of EAP, that the researcher thought second year BA undergraduate minor students of Applied Linguistics, were amongst the most appropriate sample to carry out the study on.

1.8 Writing strategies associated with EAP.

Students use various strategies to overcome writing problems when using EAP. Biggs et al (1999) mention that some learners who are less proficient in English resort to the use of strategies such as writing texts in their L1 and then translating them to L2. Biggs et al (1999) go on to note that most students who have little proficiency in English but choose to write their texts directly in English usually ignore selected aspects of a task such as the content or linguistic features, what Biggs et al (1999) refer to as message reduction. Since students at tertiary institutes cannot afford such a form of reduction, they need to develop
writing strategies which do not distort the content or texts at hand, and be familiar with their lexicon and genre rules (Biggs et al: 1999). Thus, students need to be taught genre rules and writing strategies that are appropriate for use in their writing tasks at tertiary level. It is the purpose of this study to find out student’s perceptions of writing in English so as to be able to identify their academic literacy needs for the purpose of effective curriculum development.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

1.9.1 Needs Analysis: Hutchinson & Waters (1987)

This study makes use of Hutchinson and Waters’ (1987) needs analysis (which is divided into necessities, lacks and wants) to investigate BA undergraduate students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English. As defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) necessities refer to what the learners have to know in order to effectively perform a given educational task. Lacks refer to the gap between the learners existing proficiency and their target proficiency. Wants, on the other hand, are referred to as what the learners feel they need to know in order to be able to effectively perform a given educational task. This study investigates students’ ‘necessities, lacks and wants’ in relation to the use of EAP. EAP deals with the use of English in study settings like colleges or universities where the main goal of language learning is to facilitate effective academic literacy skills. For undergraduate students, who are used to receiving instruction in languages other than English to be able to read and understand academic texts written in an L2 as well as to write structured academic essays in English, there are bound to be certain academic literacy skills which they may need to know in order for them to perform according to the required standards set in academia.
Since this current study seeks to examine undergraduate students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English, the needs analysis theoretical framework is useful as it enables an enquiry into the kind of academic literacy needs that students, taking the bilingual minor course from the Applied Linguistics, think they still need to know for them be able to effectively cope with reading materials written in English and writing an essay in English for the minor course. It is also important to recognize that needs analysis in an academic context in which English is partly a medium of instruction, provides a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of using English as a method of instruction (Hall, 1995 in Kasangana: 2006). A needs analysis of students’ academic literacy needs provides valuable data for the curriculum development process (West 1994). The study through the use of this theoretical framework also seeks to examine how language experiences reflected in the students’ linguistic and academic literacy development influence their current perceptions of academic literacy in English at university level.

1.9.2 The Sociocultural Theory

In recent past, researchers such as (Gao: 2007, Zuengler & Miller: 2006) have stressed on the relevance of sociocultural contexts when carrying out second language learning/teaching research. The university domain is a suitable context for an enquiry on undergraduate students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English, as it offers academic language use in real world situations. In a research done by Zuengler & Miller (2006) ‘context’ or ‘real world situations’ were considered fundamental to learning and also treated as variables modifying the internal acquisition process occurring in individual minds. Donato et al (1994) mention that a sociocultural approach to second language
learning research enables researchers not only to conceptualize language learning as metacognitive and cognitive activities but also as practical social acts that are meaningfully related to the learner’s identity formation. In this study, learners who are used to receiving instruction in their minority languages find themselves in a situation where they have to cope with reading one textbook and articles written in English, a language that they would not have had sufficiently exposure with at academic level. Since learning in a community of practice combines personal transformation, with the evolution of social structures, through learners participating in those communities (Wenger, 2000), it is paramount that an examination of whether or not learners with little experience with EAP perceive themselves as members of an academic community such as Applied Linguistics. Belonging to a community of practice is important for students as the more they are familiar with their discourse community’s practises, the better their academic performance and contribution towards the discipline involved.

A community of practise is defined by Swales (1990) as consisting of broadly agreed upon common goals and a system of communication to achieve these goals. The issue of communities of practise consisting of agreed upon reading and writing conventions qualifies Applied Linguistics as an Academic Discourse Community (ADC) in which students have to follow certain conventions associated with this community of practice for them to be accepted as mutually intelligible participants. According to Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) an ADC possesses genres, such as text books and journal articles which package information in ways that confirm to a discipline’s common practises.
Each academic domain has certain standards of competence which are agreed upon by community members. However, at times, there is certain jargon or ways of reading or formats of writing that instructors may deem as common sense knowledge which students possess without being taught whilst in reality students would not be aware of the assumed information. Thus, students need to be made aware of the conventions of a discourse community through explicit instruction. In most cases, it becomes each student’s responsibility, regardless of their unfamiliarity with the jargon or writing format associated with a given domain, to make sure that they devise ways which help them cope with the standards set in their communities of practice so that they can effectively participate on the basis of shared level of understanding (Swales: 1990). Thus, the aim of this current study is to find out how students who are used to receiving instruction in languages other than English, adapt to academic contexts where they have to read one text book and articles in English as well as write an academic essay in English. This sociocultural theory complements the needs analysis theory in that it provides the context in which students’ academic literacy needs can be investigated.

Sociocultural learning as a theory conceptualizes learners as social agents in active pursuit of linguistic competence and non-linguistic outcomes (Gao: 2007). This means that the reading skills and writing styles used by students are not only seen as individual choices made by the students themselves but are considered as being connected to the practices of particular communities of practice that learners belong to. This current research will make use of the sociocultural theory to understand the contextual realities that influence BA (minor of Applied Linguistics) undergraduate students’ perceptions of
academic literacy in English, at the University of Groningen. As mentioned earlier on in this theoretical section, the notion of ADC is going to be used to find out if students consider themselves as members of the Applied Linguistics discourse community considering their experiences with using EAP, and whether or not they feel as if they contribute valuable information to the Applied Linguistics community of practice when they write academic assignments in English for the minor course.

1.10 Perceptions on second language use in academia

The study of perceptions falls within the discipline of psychology. However, it is because of the interdisciplinary nature of the discipline of Applied Linguistics that it is possible to investigate issues such as undergraduate students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English. Gibson (1966) defines perception as a process of registering sensory stimuli as meaningful experience. Gibson (1996) goes on to define stimuli as something causing or regarded as causing a response, either positive or negative. The stimuli in this study refers to the academic texts that students are required to read or write during their studies in the minor course from Applied Linguistics. Gibson (1966) says that the reception of stimuli in itself is a physiological aspect of perception. Gibson (1966) proposes a direct theory of perception which he refers to as the 'bottom-up' theory which gives prominence to the presence of stimuli for perceptions to occur. Gregory (1981), an opposing constructivist proposes an indirect theory which he calls the 'top-down' theory which puts less emphasis on the influence of stimuli on people’s perceptions. Likewise, psychologist Neisser (1976) champions the interactive use of both the bottom-up and top-down approaches to the perception of information. Neisser’s (1976) view on how people perceive information goes hand in hand with some aspects of the L2 reading model (see
1.5) which view L2 reading as involving the bi-directional use of world knowledge and language knowledge.

There are a lot of previous studies which have been carried out on students’ perceptions in relation to studying in English as a second language, Griva (2009), Kasangana (2006), Gao (2007) among others. Griva (2009) studied the reading strategies of Greek students and gathered that the students used cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies when reading academic texts written in English. Such findings are relevant to this study which investigates how students’ taking a Dutch/English taught minor course from Applied Linguistics perceived reading and writing in English given the fact that their major subjects were respectively taught in languages other than English. The current study also differs from Griva’s (2009) study in that it investigates perceptions towards academic literacy in the form of both reading and writing in English. The study further examines the students’ linguistic and academic literacy development by carrying out needs analysis on their LLHs so as to gain an in-depth analysis of the research problem.

Kasangana (2006) gathered that there are two broad areas which divide perceptions on second language use in an academic context. These are positive perceptions, relating to advantages of studying and writing in English, and negative perceptions, relating to the difficulties associated with having to read and write in English considering the language being one’s second language. The issue of studying in English whilst one has not enough experience with the language leads us to the main research question for this study which
is: how do BA undergraduate second year students, who are used to receiving instruction in languages other than English, perceive academic literacy English?

1.11 Summary

This section presented a background of the examination of students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English at the University of Groningen. The provision of the background was meant to put the current study into context in retrospect to past research done in the same area of study. This current study differs from past research in that it investigates students’ perceptions of both reading and writing in English, in a bilingual minor course in Applied Linguistics at the University of Groningen, in the Netherlands. The literature that is available on this topic was critically reviewed and the assumption of the study discussed. The chapter also provided the reader with the relevant theoretical frameworks that are going to be used in the analysis of the data gathered. This section paves way for the following chapter which reports on the scope of the study. The following section defines the specific boundaries that are limited to this current study which only examines Bachelor of Arts (BA) second year students’ perceptions of reading and writing in English for a bilingual minor course offered by the Applied Linguistics department which falls under University of Groningen’s Faculty of Arts.
2. CHAPTER 2: SCOPE OF STUDY

2.1 Introduction

The sample of this study are BA second year undergraduate students who are not experienced in reading and writing in English but then find themselves enrolled in a bilingual minor course which is taught in Dutch except for one English lecture, requires students to read one textbook and some articles written in English as well as write an assignment in English. This chapter will describe the context and institutional setting of the University of Groningen and then highlight different forms of diversity that influence students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English at university level.

2.2 The context and institutional setting

A simplistic portrayal of Netherland’s linguistic landscape includes Dutch as the dominant language used in daily life and most social, cultural and political occasions. The prevalent use of Dutch in such occasions inevitably makes it difficult for those Dutch students who may want to improve their English through communicative means to achieve their English learning objectives. Most international students, such as those from Turkey and Italy, also face the same problem as English is not the main medium of instruction used in both academic and business settings in their respective countries. Nevertheless, upon entry to all taught programmes, universities such as University of Groningen require Dutch students to have passed an English state examination called Schriftelijk eindexamen VWO whilst international students are required to have passed proficiency tests such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) etcetera.
The university concerned in this enquiry, namely the University of Groningen, is located in the Netherlands, was founded in 1614 and enjoys a large international reputation as one of the leading research universities in Europe. According to the university’s website, http://www.rug.nl/corporate/index, it has more than nine faculties and offers degree programmes at Bachelor’s, Masters and PhD levels in virtually every field, unfortunately, the explicit number of programmes taught in English is not stated on the university’s website.

The university’s website states that the University of Groningen’s Faculty of Arts is a large, dynamic faculty which is located in the heart of the city of Groningen. It has more than 5000 students and 700 staff members, who work at the frontiers of knowledge every day. Information on the university’s website states that the faculty offers a wide range of degree programmes: 19 Bachelor's programmes and over 35 Master's programmes. The faculty also facilitates PhD research in the following fields: Archaeology, Cultural Studies, History, International Relations, Journalism, Language and Literary Studies, and Linguistics. Although the explicit number of programmes taught in English is not stated on the university’s website, a documented language policy for the University of Groningen’s Faculty of Arts is presented. A quotation from the faculty’s webpage http://www.rug.nl/let/faculteit/overfaculteit/index, which reads as follows;

“…..the faculty focuses on the study of the languages, cultures and history of Europe, the Mediterranean area and the North American continent. Special attention is paid to the language, culture and history of the Netherlands and particularly the Northern Netherlands region.”

(Source http://www.rug.nl/let/faculteit/overfaculteit/index)
The language policy stated above shows that the Faculty of Arts offers degree programmes which specialise in the study of different European languages. The faculty pays special attention to the Dutch language which explains why the minor course from Applied Linguistics is prominently taught in Dutch. However, due to the provision of varying degree programmes which are offered at different levels and in different languages, the University of Groningen is perceived to be a diverse community in various ways.

2.3 Diversity within the university domain.

There are many forms of diversity which can influence undergraduate student perceptions of academic literacy in English at university level. Connor (1984) notes that some potential problem areas in academic literacy stem from the issue of linguistic diversity. Connor (1984) further mentions that linguistic structure is one aspect which hinders most students from comprehending or effectively writing cohesive texts in English. Problems with recognising linguistic structures written in English may result from lack of knowledge and experience with the second language’s writing styles and conventions (Raimes: 1994).

Cummings (1994) supports learning through one’s native language as well as the L2. He says that students should be equally exposed to both their native language and L2 at all levels of learning so as to promote the development of both languages, given adequate motivation and exposure to both, either in school or in the wider development (Cumming, 1994). In this view, developing student’s L2 for academic purposes should be more fruitful if their first languages are used as languages of instruction at academic level.
Thus, this study seeks to investigate if students find it useful to sometimes learn in English considering their inexperience with the use of EAP.

Apart from linguistic diversity, there is cultural diversity and multilingualism. This cultural diversity brings about individual variation in terms of learner preferences, attitudes and motivation towards academic literacy in English (Webb et al: 2002). Individual differences are bound to affect student perceptions towards academic literacy especially if their native languages are very different in terms of structure, from English. This means that an enormous amount of cognitive restructuring would have to take place for the students to cope with using EAP (Segalowitz: 1986). Webb et al (2002) mention that, many students from social worlds which differ significantly from the values, norms, behaviour patterns, and languages of instruction presupposed by their universities, usually face problems when they receive instruction in languages such as English. In this respect, there is need to orient the students with the norms and practices associated with academic literacy in English if they are to effectively use EAP.

Last but not least, another form of diversity relevant to this current study is that of cross-cultural conflicts (Webb et al: 2002). Cross-cultural conflicts in this current study refer to how students from minority homes where instruction is in their respective minority languages, adapt to academic conventions where at times academic literacy is offered in English. As students may belong to certain cultures they may also find themselves under pressure to belong to a new academic community of practice (Webb et al: 2002). Thus, for them to be effective readers and writers in their new ADC which sometimes uses English as a medium of instruction, there is need for them be familiar with the conventions governing the use of EAP. This familiarity with the conventions of a new
community of practice, results from students engaging themselves in English reading and writing practises meant to increase their content schemata and awareness of the conventions used in academic writing.

Ball and Ellis (2007) mention that a student’s sense of identity as a writer is shaped and influenced by their language and community experience. The more one identifies with their community of practice the better chances of academic literary efficacy. If students do not fully identify with their community of practice they are consequently likely to use certain strategies in order to overcome the difficulties that they may encounter when using EAP. This observation leads us back to the focal point of this current study, which is to find out how BA undergraduate students, who are used to receiving instruction in their minorities, perceive reading and writing in English whilst studying for a bilingual minor course.

2.4 Summary

This chapter defined the scope of this study, thereby limiting the study to the investigation of BA undergraduate students’ perceptions of reading and writing in English at university level. The bilingual minor course studied by the undergraduate students was offered by the Applied Linguistics department which falls under the faculty of Arts. The context and institutional setting of the University of Groningen was defined and an outline of the different forms of diversity which affect students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English was given. An outline of the different forms of diversity which influence students’ perceptions towards the use of EAP was necessary considering the nature and language backgrounds of the participants involved in this study. The
following methodological section will report on the nature and language backgrounds of the participants as well as the procedures that were taken during the investigation of BA undergraduate students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English.
3. CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The context of this current study is a typical university setting where students can either receive instruction in English language only, languages other than English only or sometimes both, depending on programme of study. The BA second year undergraduate students chosen as the sample for this study received instruction for their major subjects, in languages such as Dutch, French, Swedish and Spanish among others depending on their areas of specialisation. The same participants were enrolled for a bilingual minor course which was taught in Dutch but had one lecture in English, involved reading a book and articles written in English as well as writing an assignment in English. The minor course which was offered by the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Groningen engaged students in a variety of English reading activities, designed to increase their subject knowledge of Applied Linguistics apart from developing their English language skills.

This current enquiry seeks to investigate how BA second year students who are used to receiving instruction in different languages such as French, Spanish, Dutch among others, cope with reading and writing in English for a minor course. This particular sample of students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English at tertiary level, and their understandings of the issue are noticeably absent from the literature, which is why the researcher saw it as a fertile ground for the study of student’s perceptions of academic literacy in English. The current study made use of questionnaires, language learning histories and interviews, as methods of gathering and validating data. The information
from questionnaires, LLHs and interviews was analysed cumulatively, with each adding a further layer of understanding to the data previously analysed. Such a multi-dimensional approach to the study of undergraduate students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English was necessary as it facilitated a valid and in-depth enquiry into the issue.

3.2 The main research question

The main research question of this current study is; how do BA undergraduate second year students, who are used to receiving instruction in languages other than English, perceive academic literacy English? The assumption of this study is that students who do not have much experience with using EAP are bound to have problems with academic literacy in English at university level. An understanding of how such a sample of participants perceives academic literacy in English is important as perceptions of modes and methods of language learning have an impact on the effectiveness of these modes and methods (Hall: 1995 in Kasangana, 2006). Knowledge of student’s perceptions towards the use of EAP will also enable curriculum developers for courses such as the minor in Applied Linguistics, to reflect on topics and issues which address undergraduate students’ academic literacy needs. Sub-questions meant to assist in adequately addressing the main research question of this study are stated in 3.2.1 below.

3.2.1 Sub-questions related to the study.

The sub-questions meant to assist in adequately addressing the main research question stated in section 3.2 are;

- Do the students enjoy academic reading in English?
- What kind of texts do they read in their Dutch/English taught minor course?
- How do they look for information when reading academic texts.
What kind of reading problems do they face when they read recommended texts in English?
What kind of reading strategies do they use when reading academic texts in English?
What do they think are the specific characteristics of an academic assignment?
What are the students’ perceptions towards academic writing as a way of engaging in academic social discourse?
Do they consider themselves as contributing any new information to the applied linguistics discourse community whenever they write academic texts in English considering their English language backgrounds?
What are the learner characteristics and cultural backgrounds of the students?
How did the students learn English during their formative years, secondary school years and university years?
What positive and negative experiences did they have back then and what did they learn from them?
What academic literacy skills did they learn or do they still feel the need to acquire so as to become better readers and writers in English?
Do the students prefer instruction in English only and why?
What are their language learning plans and goals after graduation?
What advice would they give to future students who have no experience in English?

It is important to note that questionnaires, LLHs and interviews are going to be used to address the sub-questions stated above. Sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2 and 3.4.3 will present the sub-questions in accordance to the instruments used to investigate on them.

3.3 Nature of participants

The bilingual minor course offered by the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Groningen in 2010, consisted of 23 second year students. BA undergraduate university students in their freshman or sophomore year were ideal for this study as they found themselves in a situation where they were learning their major courses in their native languages whilst the minor course from Applied Linguistics had elements of English instruction in it, which to some students was totally challenging.
given their inexperience with using EAP at tertiary level. The ages of the participants ranged between 19 and 35 years, of which 5 of them were male whilst 8 were female.

The University of Groningen requires its prospective undergraduate students to have taken a recognized English proficiency test prior admission to any programme of study. 22 students stated that they had written a Schriftelijk eindexamen VWO prior to their admission to university whilst 1 student wrote a language test from a Spanish University Language Testing Centre. When the 23 participants were asked if English was the main language of instruction used at the primary and high schools they learnt, they all mentioned that it was not. Such information was really insightful as it made the researcher wonder how students with such a deficient English language background could cope with the use of EAP at tertiary level. The participants were also asked if English was their first language of which all 23 of them stated that it was their second. A breakdown of all the participants’ nationalities, first languages and languages of instruction for their major courses, is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Showing the nationalities and a breakdown of languages other than English, which the participants receive instruction in when studying their major courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>First Language spoken</th>
<th>Language of instruction in their major subjects</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As evident in Table 1, students studying the bilingual minor course also received instruction in other languages of the world in the courses they majored in at the University of Groningen. The largest number of students are those who received instruction in Dutch with a total is (6), English with (5), French with (3), Swedish with (3), Italian with (3), Danish with (2) and Spanish with (1). Such linguistic diversity and diversity in terms of the social, economic and educational worlds that the students in the minor class came from, actually probed the current researcher to investigate their perceptions of academic literacy in English.

3.4 Procedure

The purpose of this study was to investigate students’ academic literacy needs. Questionnaires, interviews, participatory observation and thinking aloud are considered by Schroder (1981 in Griva 2009) as suitable tools for getting at students’ needs. However, this current study focused on the use of questionnaires, LLHs and interviews as data gathering instruments (Figure 2 below)
23 QUESTIONNAIRES ARE COLLECTED FROM ALL PARTICIPANTS THROUGH NESTOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS</th>
<th>CLOSED QUESTIONS IN WHICH STUDENTS ALSO GIVE REASONS FOR THE CHOICES MADE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AN INTERPRETATION OF THE OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS IS DONE USING THE NEEDS ANALYSIS APPROACH AND THE SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY</td>
<td>A FREQUENCY ANALYSIS OF THE ANSWERS FROM THE CLOSED QUESTIONS IS DONE; THE REASONS FOR THE CHOICES MADE ARE ANALYSED USING NEEDS ANALYSIS AND THE SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Original adaptive Questions from Murphey et al (2004) are given to the 23 students via Nestor to guide them write their LLHs

The 23 LLHs are collected but only four LLHs of students with negative perceptions towards both reading and writing in English are analysed (See their responses to Questions 1 and 9 in Table 2 and 3) following Morse in Ryan and Bernard (2000:780), who suggests the use of six participants for qualitative enquiry

LLHs analysed using codes from Needs Analysis (necessities, lacks and wants) and other emerging codes and, - sociocultural approach

Out of the four students whose LLHs were analyzed one student volunteered to be interviewed and tape recorded so as to confirm the major findings from her LLH and seek clarification in some areas (see Appendix 4 for recorded interview)

Figure 2: Showing a synopsis of the procedure that was taken in this study.

3.4.1 Administration of the questionnaire.
As shown in Figure 2, a quantitative analysis of BA undergraduate students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English was done through the use of a questionnaire. In the questionnaire, the researcher asked 13 questions which explored issues related to the use of EAP (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire had two sections; the first section consisted of 8 questions which were based on issues related to reading academic texts in English whilst the second section contained 5 questions which focused on issues related to writing academic assignments in English. Questions on reading skills reflected on aspects such as the students’ attitudes towards the use of EAP, the influence of English on L2 effective comprehension as well as the use of reading strategies during the L2 reading process. Questions on writing skills reflected on aspects such as domain specific writing conventions as well as student’s discourse community identity formation. The sub-questions addressed in the questionnaire are;

- Do the students enjoy academic reading and writing in English?
- What kind of texts do the students read in their Dutch taught minor course?
- How do they look for information when reading academic texts?
- What do they think makes a text difficult to read and understand?
- What kind of reading problems do the students face when they read recommended texts in English?
- What kind of reading strategies do they use when reading academic texts in English?
- What do they think are the specific characteristics of an academic assignment?
- What are their perceptions towards academic writing as a way of engaging in academic social discourse?
- Do they consider themselves as contributing any new information to the Applied Linguistics discourse community whenever they read and write academic texts in English considering their language background?

The above sub-questions provide a chain of reasoning through which the researcher seeks to address the main question of this study. The sub-questions actually guided the researcher in the formulation of the questions that were used in the questionnaire which contained both open-ended and close questions. Although some questions were close-
ended, the participants were allowed to develop their answers further in the spaces provided, so as to substantiate their close-ended choices. A frequency analysis was done to the closed responses of the questionnaire whilst data from the all open-ended questions was analysed using needs analysis and the sociocultural framework. Using such a multi-dimensional analytic approach was necessary as it allowed for an investigation of students’ academic literacy needs with in an academic sociocultural context.

The questionnaire which was given to the participants as an assignment for their minor course was administered through Nestor, which is the electronic learning environment of the University of Groningen. Giving the questionnaire to students as an assignment was meant to maximise participation as the class only consisted of 23 students. The main reason for the using of the questionnaire first, was to gather student’s perceptions of academic literacy in English at a quantitative scale. LLHs were later analysed at a qualitative level (see 3.4.2) so as to add a further layer of understanding to the issues raised in the questionnaires. The use of questionnaires and LLHs provided a link between the students’ current perceptions of academic literacy in English at university level and their past English language experiences.

3.4.2 Administration of language learning Histories (LLHs)

Gimenez in (Litosseliti: 2010) mentions that the term narrative is often used interchangeably with ‘life story’, ‘account’, ‘discourse’, or ‘narration’. A narrative analysis is what Riessman (2004) refers to as one’s account of his/her language learning history. This current study will analyze LLHs with in narrative networks. Gimenez in (Litosseliti: 2010) states that a narrative network is defined as a group of stories, texts and artifacts
collected around the emerging issues in a core narrative. Gimenez in (Litosseliti: 2010) further mentions that the texts chosen for analysis in any narrative study should be able to represent the research problem; represent counter evidence and prevent argumentative circularity; highlight the relationship between the narrative and its immediate context of production and consumption; and be endorsed by those involved in producing and consuming all the texts analyzed.

The literature (Haines, 2008; Murphey et al., 2004), shows the use of LLHs as an enlightening procedure which provides an in-depth understanding of students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English, in their own words thereby revealing the origins of their current understandings and perceptions of using EAP. The same 23 students, who answered the 23 questionnaires, were asked to write their LLHs as a second assignment for the minor course in Applied Linguistics. To enable students to write insightful LLHs, the researcher made use of Murphey et al’s (2004) original instructions for narrative analysis (see Figure 3).
My language learning history

Write about your language learning history from when you began learning English to the present. Make use of the following questions to guide your writing. Length: about 750 words:

• How did you learn English before you started in Higher Education?

• What positive and negative experiences did you have and what did you learn from them?

• In terms of learning English, what were you expecting before you started in Higher Education?

• When you started in Higher Education, what were you surprised about in your classes or in the surrounding environment?

• Have you changed your ways of language learning since starting in Higher Education?

• What are the things that you found especially helpful, either in classes or outside them?

• What areas do you still want to improve in?

• What are your language learning plans as well as goals after graduation?

• What kind of advice would you give to future students?

Figure 3: Language Learning History: questions for participants (adapted from Murphey et al 2004: 86)

As shown in Figure 3, the questions developed by Murphey et al (2004) reflect on the students’ formative, high school and university years. Apart from examining student perceptions of the use of EAP at university level, this current study is also concerned with the students’ linguistic and academic literacy development which makes Murphey et al’s (2004) adaptive questions relevant for use as they reflect on how students learnt English before high school, how they currently perceive academic literacy at university level as well as their goals after university (see Figure 3)
Since the LLHs provided by the students also reflected on their experiences with the use of EAP at university level, they were of great value to this study as Gimenez in (Litosseliti: 2010) states that texts chosen for any narrative study should highlight the relationship between the narrative and its immediate context of production and consumption. However, an inquiry into how the students learnt English before high school and their language plans after university graduation was also necessary as it facilitated an examination of the historic and futuristic elements that govern students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English.

Murphey’s et al’s (2004) questions were provided to the students through Nestor, which is the electronic learning environment of the University of Groningen. Murphey et al (2004) mention that the use of LLHs as data for analysis allows the researcher to ground his/ her observations in the students’ discourse. Goodson (1995) mentions that life history research represents stories of action within theories of context. Thus, it is used in situations where more understanding of and insight into a particular situation (or group of people) is needed. This makes the method very suitable for this current study which seeks to get more insights into each student’s academic literacy development so as to understand their current perceptions of academic literacy in English.

Another idea behind the use of Murphey et al’s (2004) original questions was to prompt participants to raise issues, in their LLHs, that would inform the guiding sub-questions presented in section 3.4.2.1. LLHs were meant to address the following sub-questions:

- How did the students learn English before high school?
• What were the students’ attitudes towards learning in English before and after high school?
• How did the students learn English before coming to high school?
• What positive and negative experiences did they have in primary and high school then and what did they learn from them?
• What academic literacy skills did they learn at university?
• Do the students prefer instruction in ESL only and why?
• What are their language learning plans and goals after graduation?
• What advice would they give to future students who have no experience with using EAP?

3.4.2.1 The selection of LLHs used for analysis

Although 23 LLHs were initially gathered from the participants, only four LLHs of students with extreme negative perceptions of academic literacy were chosen for analysis. The researcher chose to analyse the LLHs of students with extreme negative perceptions towards academic literacy in English following Gimenez in (Litosseliti: 2010) who states that the texts chosen for analysis in any narrative analysis should represent the research problem. Since the assumption of this current study is that students who do not have experience with reading and writing in English are likely to face problems with using EAP, the LLHs of students with negative perceptions towards reading and writing in English definitely represented the research problem at hand.

The reason why only four LLHs were chosen follows Morse in Ryan and Bernard (2000: 780) who suggests the use of six participants for qualitative enquiry (Haines: 2008). In this regard, four students with extreme negative perceptions towards the use of EAP granted their permission for their LLHs to be used for analysis. Nevertheless, the four students were asked to sign consent forms (see Appendix 2) so as to document their approval, for ethical purposes. The students were guaranteed anonymity as they did not
want their real names to be revealed in this study. Thus, the four students with extreme negative perceptions towards reading and writing in English were given the pseudo names Salomon, Shona, Mary and Jane in order to maintain their privacy. Extreme negative perceptions refer to those students who chose the option “not at all” for the closed parts of questions 1a and 9a of the questionnaires (see Appendix 1), and who also mentioned their academic literacy deficiencies in the form of needs, in particular ‘lacks’, in the open ended sections of the questions 1b and 9b (see Tables 2 and 3 below for a sample of the responses)

**Question 1): Do you enjoy academic reading in ESL?**

**b) Give reasons.**

**Table 2: showing the negative responses to Question 1b, of four students who’s LLHs were used for analysis.**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salomon</strong></td>
<td>“The reason why I don’t like academic reading in English is mostly due to my pace of reading. I’m a very slow reader, which can be quite a burden in relation to the amount of reading we have to do. I am used to reading French instead”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shona</strong></td>
<td>“I do not enjoy reading in English at all because my major field of study is not English, but Spanish. Therefore I lack experience in reading academic texts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mary</strong></td>
<td>“I do not enjoy academic reading in English. Sometimes the texts are more difficult for me. I study French, so it is confusing for me when I start academic reading in English”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jane</strong></td>
<td>“I do not enjoy. I only come across English in this minor and I feel insecure when I read in English. I do not have enough vocabulary so it takes time to read in that language. I think that I read three times faster when I read in something written in Dutch”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 9): Considering your language background, what do you think of academic writing in ESL?

b) Give reasons.

Table 3: Showing the negative responses to Question 9b, of four students who’s LLHs were used for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salomon</td>
<td>“I have never written an academic essay and the LLH assignment is my first one. It is hard for me. I lack the ability to express myself in English academic texts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shona</td>
<td>“I think it’s still quite hard for me to write in academic English as I haven’t had a lot of practice” I am used academic writing in Spanish.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“I have more trouble with writing than with reading. All my lessons at secondary school, about learning how to write in different styles were in French”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“I have done it just one time yet: when I wrote my LLH yesterday. I prefer writing in Dutch, because-like I wrote in my LLH- I am able to express things very beautiful and uncommon in that language and I am not able to do that in English as I lack experience and confidence”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, Salomon, Shona, Mary, Jane had extreme negative perceptions towards academic literacy in English. Consequently, their narratives were chosen for analysis hoping that the LLHs would provide an in-depth understanding of the problems highlighted in reading and writing problems highlighted in Tables 2 and 3 above. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, Salomon mentioned that she was slow when it came to reading in English as she only had experience with reading in French. Salomon also mentioned that the assignment on LLHs was her first academic assignment to be written in English and claimed to dislike writing in English because she could not express herself properly when writing English academic texts. Salomon’s extreme negative attitude
towards the use of EAP was a result of lack of practice and unfamiliarity with the reading and writing skills involved in the use of EAP.

Shona, as reported in Tables 2 and 3, had negative perceptions towards both forms of academic literacy because she was used to reading and writing in Spanish hence she lacked experience with using EAP. Mary also found reading texts written in English quite challenging and confessed that writing in English was much more difficult for her compared to reading in English because she lacked a thorough knowledge of the rules governing the syntactic structures used when writing academic essays in English.

Mary just like Salomon had no practice with the use of EAP as she majored in French and was used to reading or writing in French at academic level. Mary mentioned that she did not enjoy reading as she, at times, found some English articles from the minor course difficult to read. Mary who majored in French stated in Figure 3 that she had more problems with L2 writing as compared to L2 reading. This resulted from the fact reading was considered as the basis for reading (Carson and Leki (1993). If a student is was bad reader in English, it definitely reflected in his/ her writing, as noted by Hirvela (2004). Thus, there was need for Mary to improve her reading skills in English if she needed to become a better writer in English. In order for Mary to have improved her reading skills, she needed to be taught cognitive skills such as skimming and scanning, metacognitive skills as well as be exposed to comprehensible reading material which she could understand. Krashen’s (1979) input hypothesis states that readers needed to be exposed to comprehensible reading material which was within their comprehensible range, what he referred to as i+1, with i representing the reader’s proficiency level and +1
representing reading material that was slightly above the learner’s reading level but within comprehensible range.

Jane mentioned that she felt insecure with reading texts which were written in English as she had limited English vocabulary as a result of lacking practice with reading academic texts written in English. Jane in Table 2 mentioned that the exercise on LLHs was actually her first academic assignment to be written in English as she majored in the Dutch language. The fact that the assignment on LLHs was her first academic assignment to be written in English, revealed her lack of practice in writing essays in English, at academic level which consequently resulted in her having extreme negative perceptions towards writing in English, the same as the other students.

The researcher thought it would be better to analyze the LLHs of students with extreme academic literacy problems as this would facilitate an enquiry into the reading and writing strategies that the students used, to cope with academic literacy in English at university level. In order to identify the four students’ linguistic and academic literacy needs, their LLHs were analyzed using the three codes from Hutchinson and Waters (1987) needs analysis together with other emerging codes as shown in 3.4.2.2. A coded reflection of each student’s LLH revealed personal information relating to their English language learning experiences, attitudes towards learning in English since childhood until university, the current problems they faced when they used EAP, possible solutions to the problems identified, as well as their future goals. Such insightful personal information could not have been gathered through the use of scientific enquiry.
### 3.4.2.2 Codes used to analyze LLHs

The three codes from needs analysis which are necessities, lacks and wants, were used by the researcher to analyse each LLH. As defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) *necessities* refer to what the learners have to know in order to effectively perform a given educational task. *Lacks* are the gap between the learners’ existing proficiency and their target proficiency whilst *Wants* are referred to as what the learners feel they need to know in order to be able to effectively perform a given educational task. The three codes from needs analysis namely ‘necessities, lacks and wants’ paved way (as later explained after Figure 4 below) for the emergence of other codes. For procedural purposes, the researcher through the provision of *working definitions* (for all codes except interference which was defined using Newmark’s (1966) ) definition, managed to link the emergent codes to their respective antecedents from needs analysis in a way which facilitated a logical analysis of the LLHs (see Figure 4 below). Newmark’s (1966) definition of interference was ideal for use, in analyzing the LLHs of students who had negative perceptions towards academic literacy in English, as it defined interference as a product of language contact between the students’ L1 and L2. A coded copy of a Shona’s LLH (one of the four students whose LLHs were analyzed in this study) is shown in *Appendix 3* in order to provide an insight into the coding process that the researcher underwent during the analysis of the four LLHs. Figure 4 below gives a synopsis of the codes used to analyze the four LLHs.
Emergent codes such as interference and exposure were linked to the code “necessities”. Interference was taken to refer to the use of first-language words or rules in second-language performance (Newmark: 1966). The emergent code “interference” was linked to necessities because it was a product of a situation where a student would have been exposed to two or more languages that were used for instructional purposes due to the requirements of a particular course. In the minor course from Applied Linguistics, students who majored in languages other than English were exposed to both Dutch and English. They had to read one book and articles written in English, and write an essay in
English. This made it a necessity for the students to be competent readers and writers in both Dutch and English if they were to pass the minor course. *Exposure* was another emergent code which was linked to “necessities”. The term ‘exposure’ was used to refer to the frequency of practise that a learner got in using EAP. A link between ‘exposure’ and ‘necessities’ was logical because students needed to be occasionally exposed to comprehensible texts written in English if they were to effectively use EAP. Exposure to reading material from Applied Linguistics facilitated content schemata which would help students improve their word recognition skills among others, thereby helping them to become fluent L2 readers in English.

The emergent codes *complications, self-initiated enrolment, attitude* and *expectations* were linked to the code “lacks”. *Complications* were taken to refer to the act of creating a complex, confusing or difficult situation. This emergent code was placed under the code of “lacks” due to the fact that it was difficult for students to carry out tasks which needed them to use skills that they lacked. This in turn would complicate the learning process. *Self-initiated enrolment* was taken to refer to the personally influenced decisions to learn that were made by the learners after realising that they lacked certain reading or writing skills. Of vital significance in the progression towards reading competence was the question of attitude. The emergent code *attitude* was taken to refer to the learners’ feelings towards using a given language as a method of learning. This emergent code was linked to the code “lack” as students who lacked academic literacy skills were likely to have negative attitudes towards the use of EAP. The emergent code *expectations* was taken to refer to what the students expected would happen in future given the nature of
their English language proficiency at a given point in time. This emergent code was linked to “lacks” as students always made expectations which are based on their capabilities. For instance, if a student had a poor English language proficiency level, he/she would have expectations which would not include much contact with the English language.

The sub-codes focus and solution were placed under the code “wants” which refers to what the learners feel they needed to know or have for them to study effectively at university level. Focus as an emergent code was taken to refer to the most important thing which the students considered as top priority during their learning at university. This emergent code was linked to “wants” because the researcher also intended to find out whether students preferred receiving instruction in their minority languages only, in English only or in both and why?. The emergent code solution was taken to refer to how students thought their problems with academic literacy could be addressed. The code was linked to “wants” because it allowed students to suggest what they felt could be done to enhance their efficacy in using EAP.

All the codes from needs analysis and other emergent codes mentioned in this section were used by the researcher to make an in-depth analysis of each student’s LLH by examining their linguistic and academic literacy development. A copy of one coded LLH is included in Appendix 3 in order to provide an example of the coding process. Such an enquiry was made through the use of Murphey et al’s (2004) original instructions for narrative analysis (see Figure 2) which provided a sociocultural context for the study of
the students language and academic literacy needs from their formative years, high school years until university. The motive behind the analysis of the four LLHs was to add a further layer of understanding to the problems localised in the questionnaires.

3.4.3 Confirmation interview.

After analyzing the four LLHs of students who had extreme cases of academic literary deficiencies, the researcher managed to interview one volunteer student (out of the four) in order to confirm the student’s attitudes towards academic literacy in English as well as to clarify a few pertinent issues which had cropped up in the LLHs. An interview with Salomon was done to verify if what the researcher had interpreted from her LLH was exactly what the student meant to say. The interviewee was presented with a copy of her analyzed LLH two weeks before the scheduled interview which was carried out on the 29th of June 2010. The interview was done to facilitate participant validation following Gimenez in (Litosseliti: 2010) who mentioned that texts chosen for analysis in any narrative study should be endorsed by those involved in producing and consuming all the texts analyzed.

Apart from seeking confirmation and validation from the student through the interview, the researcher also took the opportunity to ask about issues such as the need for ‘grammar’ which the students mentioned but had not clearly defined thereby leaving the researcher wondering what exactly the students referred to as grammar. The most pertinent questions asked in Salomon’s interview are;

- You said you learnt the production of English words in primary school, was there any element of grammar? at 01:27 minutes- listen to Appendix 5
• How did you learn and cope with grammar in high school? at 02:48 minutes
• Do you feel like you know all the procedures needed when writing academic texts in English? at 09:27 minutes
• What would you like to learn about writing skills (What do you consider as grammar)? at 09:40 minutes
• Do you approve of the interpretations done to your LLH by the researcher? at 15:10 minutes

Data from Salomon’s confirmation interview (which is included in Appendix 4) is presented and analyzed together with her LLH.

3.5 Summary

This methodological section tried to provide a clear and precise description of the procedures involved in conducting the study, and the rational as to why specific measures were taken. Questionnaires, LLHs and a confirmation interview were used as data gathering instruments with the intention of adequately addressing the main research question. Each data gathering instrument used added a further layer of understanding to the data previously analyzed. The questionnaire and Murphey et al’s (2004) original instructions for narrative analysis were given to 23 students as part of their assignments for the minor course through Nestor, the University of Groningen’s electronic learning website. This was done in order to maximize participation. A quantitative analysis based on needs analysis and the sociocultural approach was then carried out on the data gathered from the questionnaires, in order to gain an insight of the situation whilst a qualitative analysis based on codes from needs analysis and other emerging sub-codes, was done to the four LLHs of students with extreme negative perceptions to academic literacy in English so as to get an in-depth understanding of the problems localized in the questionnaires. A confirmation interview was done with one voluntary student, in order
to validate and clarify issues pertaining to the aspect of grammar. The findings from the above mentioned procedures are presented and analyzed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to presenting and analyzing the findings of this current study which investigates undergraduate student’s perceptions of academic literacy in English at the University of Groningen. The participants involved in this study were students of a minor course in applied linguistics. The presentation and analysis of the findings is going to be done in three stages which are reflective of the three data gathering instruments used. Firstly, an analysis of data that was gathered from the questionnaires is going to done by presenting the questions with their respective responses. This will be followed an analysis of four LLHs which were chosen through a needs analysis criterion done to students’ responses to questions 1b and 9b of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1). Thus, the questionnaires of students who had mentioned their academic literacy needs in the form of “lacks” actually guided the researcher on the selection of the four LLHs analyzed in this section. Lastly, a presentation and analysis of data gathered from the interviews will be presented as a way of validating and confirming the interpretations, done by the researchers, of student’s perceptions of academic literacy in English and their language learning experiences portrayed in their LLHs.

4.2 Questionnaire results and interpretation:

4.2.1 Perceptions of academic reading in English.

Question 1: Do you enjoy reading academic texts written in English?
Responding to the first question, students had mixed reactions as to whether or not they enjoyed academic literacy in English at university level. 17.4% said Quite a lot, 8.7% said so-so, 13.0% said not really and 60.9% said not at all. See Table 4 below.

Table 4: Showing students’ responses on whether they enjoyed reading in English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So so</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The bar chart in Figure 5 below is a visual representation of the responses as to whether or not students enjoyed academic literacy in English.
Figure 5: Bar graph showing student’s responses on whether or not they enjoyed reading in English.

The 17.4% who opted for the answer “quite a lot” claimed to be very passionate about reading academic texts in English. They also said they loved to read academic texts in English as they perceived it as a prestigious and universal language which made them feel connected to the world at large. Such an observation is in line with Kasangana’s (2006) findings in which students’ positive perceptions towards learning in English were based on the benefits of using English. 8.7% gave the response so-so stating that although reading academic texts in English was challenging, they saw it as a way of improving their proficiency in English through practice. They viewed reading in English at university level as a way of improving their English since they intended on working in English speaking countries such as the United States, Australia and United Kingdom.

13.0% of the students who said “not really” said they sometimes liked reading in English, however, their enjoying reading academic texts in English was usually marred by so many unfamiliar discipline specific words which they came across when reading most articles. The largest majority of 60.9% totally claimed not to enjoy academic reading in English as they felt insecure because of lacking the experience of reading academic texts in English. They claimed to have had little contact with the English language in the past years given the fact that they received instruction in languages other than English. They highlighted that they only come across English texts in the minor course. These observations are in line with Kasangana’s (2006) findings in which students’ negative perceptions towards learning in English are based on the difficulties associated with
having to read and write in English. A needs analysis shows that students lack proper training in the use of EAP hence they need to be taught academic literacy skills which will enable them to be effective readers of academic texts written in English.

The table below contains samples of the open-ended responses to question 1b, (see Appendix 1 for the questionnaire) of four students who had extreme negative perceptions of reading academic texts in English;

**Table 5: Showing recap of the responses of four student’s with extreme negative perceptions towards reading academic texts in English.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salomon</td>
<td>“The reason why I don’t like academic reading in English is mostly due to my pace of reading. I’m a very slow reader, which can be quite a burden in relation to the amount of reading we have to do. I am used to reading French instead”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shona</td>
<td>“I do not enjoy reading in English at all because my major field of study is not English, but Spanish. Therefore I lack experience in reading academic texts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“I do not enjoy academic reading in English. Sometimes the texts are more difficult for me. I study French, so it is confusing for me when I start academic reading in English”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“I do not enjoy. I only come across English in this minor and I feel insecure when I write in English because I do not understand long complex sentences in most English texts”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the four students in Table 5 have negative perceptions of reading academic texts in English because they have not had sufficient practice with EAP in particular reading academic texts written in English.

**Question 2: What kind of texts do you read in your English taught minor course?**
The 23 students mentioned in their responses that they read a variety of academic texts in the minor course. The students mentioned that despite their lack of exposure to EAP, they were required to read one English book and English articles. This was meant to increase their knowledge base and to prepare them for assignments. The Students noted that reading academic texts that were written in English was the most challenging thing for them to do in comparison to reading texts written in their minority languages. Students noted that that they were not quite familiar with some of the sentence structures that they came across in most English written academic texts from Applied Linguistics. This point reflects on the sociocultural theory, stated by Gao (2007), which stresses on the need for students to be familiar with the jargon and writing conventions of their discourse community if they are to effectively cope with academic literacy in English.

**Question 3: How do you look for information when reading academic texts written in English?**

The students stated that they used the glossary pages in the appendix of the English academic text books that they had to look for key-words and sub-headings which would be in line with what they would be researching on. Once they would have identified the suitable pages containing the key words, they then looked for specific information relevant to their question and then marked with a color pen or underlined with a pen all the information they thought was necessary. By looking for particular information, the students involved themselves in what Grabe (2002) refers to as scanning. According to Grabe (2002) scanning is a cognitive processing strategy used by most students to identify specific information during L2 reading. A needs analysis shows that
metacognitive abilities like scanning, and cognitive abilities like word recognition are a necessity for undergraduate students to possess if they are to be effective readers.

**Question 4: Do you use the same methods of reading when you read academic texts written in English as compared to entertainment magazines?**

When asked whether they used the same reading methods for reading academic texts and entertainment magazines written in English, 82,6% of students chose the response “no” whilst 17,4% said “yes” as shown in Table 6 below.

**Table 6: Showing students’ responses on whether or not they used the same approaches to read both academic texts and non-academic texts.**

| Use same method to read magazines and academic texts written in English. |  |
|---|---|---|
| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
| Yes | 4 | 17,4 |
| No | 19 | 82,6 |

The bar chart in Figure 6 below is a visual representation of the responses as to whether or not students used the same reading approaches to read academic texts and entertainment magazines.
As shown in the bar chart in Figure: 6, 82.6% of the students acknowledged that they did not use the same reading methods for English written academic texts and entertainment magazines. They mentioned that they read entertainment magazines in order to relax their minds as not much attention to form was needed given that they only intended on getting the general idea of a story as compared to academic reading where they really had to concentrate and pay attention to form, such as how words are used in a text or how sentences are used to construct meaning etcetera. A needs analysis reflects that the ability to identify and interpret linguistic (phonological, lexical, syntactic and contextual) cues when reading an English academic text was necessary as it facilitated effective L2 comprehension. The students commented that most of the language and sentence
structures used in some of the English articles that they read for the minor were a bit complicated for them as most of the vocabulary used was discipline specific. As a result they constantly referred to the English dictionary when reading the English written academic texts, which was something which they did not do when reading entertainment magazines.

From a sociocultural perspective, the minor students first, had to be taught the necessary reading skills needed for them to be able to skim and scan for information when reading academic texts written in English. Secondly, they had to be exposed to comprehensible reading material which contained the basic concepts of Applied Linguistics so as to expand their content schemata in the subject area. Supplying the students with texts beyond their reading level made them perceive reading in English as a mammoth task. The students in the 82, 6 percentage ranges highlighted that they thought there was a big vocabulary gap between them and the authors of the English academic texts which they read. Thus the students thought that expanding their vocabulary would make them cope with the language used by the authors who wrote books about Applied Linguistics issues.

**Question 5: In your major programme of study do you only read texts written in English or texts written in languages other than English?**

When students where asked about the nature of the language used in the texts they read their respective programmes of study, 73,9% mentioned that they read both English written academic texts and academic texts written in other languages of the world such as French, Spanish, Norwegian., Danish, Italian, Swedish and Dutch. 26, 1% mentioned
that they usually came across a lot of English texts in their areas of study, see Table 7: below.

Table 7: Showing of students’ responses to the kind of texts that they read in their undergraduate studies in general.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read texts in English and other languages</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read texts in other languages only</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>73,9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A visual interpretation of the nature of academic texts which the students read during their undergraduate studies in general is shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Showing responses to the kind of texts that the student read in their undergraduate studies.
As shown in Figure 7 above, 73.9% said that they were used to reading academic texts written in languages other than English. Moreover, the students stated that they had problems with reading academic texts written in English as compared to academic texts written in their own minority languages due to the fact that they had little experience with reading English academic texts from the linguistics discipline. A needs analysis shows that undergraduate students lack exposure to academic texts in English. This is why they found the minor challenging as they came across a book and articles written in English, a language they were not familiar with using at academic level.

Some students who were used to reading texts written in languages other than English actually expressed the need to have all their classes in either English only, if they were to prosper in effectively learning how to use EAP or only in the languages they were studying in. They mentioned that using mixed languages for learning at university made their L1 to interfere with their L2 whenever they read academic texts written in English and vice versa. Others with in the 73.9 percentage of students who read texts in both English and their respective minority languages, said that learning in both languages was an advantage for them as they could easily refer to their L1 whenever they faced problems with reading texts written in English. Kasangana (2006) mentions that the more developed an L1 is, in terms of being used as a language of instruction at university level, the better chances of improving in EAP. This shows that students whose L1 is developed and used as a language of instruction at university level have a greater chance of perfecting the usage of their L2 academic wise as compared to those students whose L1s are not used as mediums of instruction in tertiary education.
Question 6: Are you more comfortable with reading books written in your native language as compared to English?

In response to whether students were more comfortable with reading academic texts written in their native languages as compared to those written in English, 65% said quite a lot, 13.0% said so-so, 4.3% said not really whilst 17.4% said not at all see Table 8 below

Table: 8 Showing students’ responses on whether or not they felt more comfortable with reading texts written in their native languages as compared to reading texts written in English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So so</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A visual representation of the responses is clearly shown in Figure 8 below.
Figure 8: Showing students responses on whether or not they felt more comfortable reading texts written in their native languages as compared to reading those written in English.

As shown in Figure 8 above, 65% of the students mentioned that they were more comfortable reading academic texts written in their native language because they have had enough exposure reading in them. A percentage of 13, 0 chose the answer so-so whilst 4, 3% chose not really. These students stated that their being comfortable with reading in English or not depended on the nature of the language used in any given text. If the language structures were easy then they have no problem, but if the sentences became complicated or contained many unfamiliar words, then began to feel uncomfortable. 17,4 said ‘not at all’ stating that there were topics in linguistics which were better read in English than their minorities as some translations of the jargon used in linguistics were not easy to find in their own native languages.
Question 7a: What kind of problems do you face when reading academic texts in English?

This question required both closed and open-ended responses. There were certain reading problems which occurred more frequent than others. However, the most frequent reading problem that was mentioned by 21 participants was that of word recognition. However, as reflected in the open ended part of the question 7b which asked students to justify the closed choices they had made in question 7a, 91, 3% (see Table 9) of students highlighted two kinds of problems with word recognition. The first problem involved the recognition of discipline specific words whilst the second one involved recognising key words in a sentence during L2 reading.

Table 9: Showing the number of students who had problems with specific word recognition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems with word recognition</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student’s response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>91,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 9 above, 91, 3% of the respondents said that they had problems understanding certain word forms which belonged to the discipline of Applied Linguistics. They mentioned that most of the words which they could not recognize where those which were not commonly used in ordinary speech. According to Hulstijn (2001) fluent readers should be able to automatically recognise at least 95% of the words which appear in an English written text. Thus, if students can not recognise 95% of the words in a text, they will definitely face problems with reading.
Other students within the 93, 0% range of students who had problems with word recognition also stated that they failed to identify key words in a sentence. It is important in reading to practise the art of distinguishing between words and phrases that were strictly relevant to the message being put across in a text and those that were not. This reading approach was necessary as it created the platform for fast and efficient reading. Apart from word recognition problems, another frequent reading problem highlighted by a student percentage of 60, 9, was that of not being able to understand long syntactic structures.

**TABLE 10: Showing the number of students who had problems with understanding long syntactic clauses during the reading process.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems with reading complex sentences</th>
<th>Student’s response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60,9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39,1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 10, a total of 60, 9% of students mentioned that they could not understand long syntactic clauses written in English. 39, 1% did not mention the problem. Those who mentioned the problem noted that not being able to understand long syntactic structures actually hindered effective reading as they spent most of their time re-reading, and trying to understand sentences. A needs analysis reveals that if students still have to pause frequently and wrestle over the meaning of words and phrases whenever they read in English, then their reading is not skilled. Students need to have the ability to automatically understand linguistic cues and this can be attained if the students are gradually introduced to academic texts with the right levels of difficulty in reference to lexical and syntactic content. This will facilitate effective learning otherwise giving
students texts which are beyond their comprehension will only lead to more reading problems. Thus, students have to take it upon themselves and practise reading academic texts written in English. Familiarising themselves with English texts can help them increase their vocabulary base and this in turn become fluent readers.

In the open-ended part of this question 10 participants mentioned that they had problems with identifying the author’s intended meaning as well as understanding the sequencing of information done in the English written academic articles that they came across, what Grabe (2000) refers to as argument structure. All these mentioned problems show that there are certain discourse community conventions (such as jargon, argument structure etcetera) which students need to be aware of, from a sociocultural point of view, to be able to function adequately in a specific discourse community. The issue of students not being aware of the writing conventions used in the texts they read is in line with Hutchinson and Waters (1987) needs analysis theory which seeks to identify student’s needs so that they may be addressed through EAP curricula. The issue of identifying with the practices of a discourse domain is also in line with Gao’s (2007) sociolinguistic view that academic reading requires students to be able to identify cohesive features that may be dominant in a given academic domain. Gao’s (2007) findings that students need to be familiarised with the conventions of their discourse communities is useful as it substantiates the findings in this current study.

**Question 8: How do you handle the problems you come across when reading academic texts in English?**
The students mentioned that the strategies which they used whenever they faced reading problems were dependent on the nature of the problem at hand. 19 students from the 21 who faced word recognition problems (see Table 9) mentioned that they consulted a manual or online dictionary whenever they came across any unfamiliar words whilst reading. A needs analysis shows that a dictionary is useful for students who have poor word recognition skills although they may not find direct equivalent explanations.

Fifteen students said they translated English words into their native languages and then re-interpreted them back to L2. This shows that the students activated background knowledge whenever they came across L2 words whose English dictionary meanings they did not understand. This confirms students’ reference to their knowledge base during reading, which was mentioned in Birch’s (2002) L2 reading model. Thus, students made use of the knowledge that they already had, to understand new information. Three students said they sometimes asked for L2-L1 syntactic translations from their peers who had better English language proficiency. However, translating and reinterpreting from L1 to L2 syntactic structures and vice-versa, was problematic as students were most likely to distort the author’s intended meaning of a text, thus, causing more complications to the L2 reader.

Eight students mentioned that they usually tried to guess the meaning of a word by looking at other surrounding words and making contextual inferences. The 60.9% of students who had problems with understanding long syntactic clauses (see Table 10) said
they re-read the sentences over again to try and get the correct meaning, or asked their peers if the problem persisted.

4.2.2 Perceptions of academic writing in English.

Question 9: Considering your language background what do you think of academic writing in English?

The responses to this question were that 13.0% said that they enjoyed academic writing quite a lot, 17.4% said gave the response so-so, 39.1% gave the response “not really” whilst 30.4% said not at all as shown in Table 11 below.

Table 11: showing whether or not students enjoyed academic writing in English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So so</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A visual representation of the responses to the question whether or not the students enjoyed academic literacy is given in Figure 9 below.
Figure 9: Showing the responses to whether or not the students enjoyed academic writing.

When students were asked whether or not they enjoyed academic writing in English, 13, 0% chose the response “quite a lot”. This percentage of students mentioned that they enjoyed academic writing in English because, to them, English was more of a prestigious and international language as compared to their minority languages. From a sociocultural perspective, the issue of status and the global benefits associated with English influenced this percentage of students (13, 0%) to identify positively with the language. The students who said they enjoyed writing in English also highlighted that they viewed studying in English language through the minor, as a good way of practicing their English writing skills as they intended to further their education in English speaking countries such as Australia, United States of America among others.
17, 4% of students gave the response so-so. The highest number of 39, 1% gave the answer “not really” whilst the second highest of 30, 4% gave the response “not at all”. The two groups of students who gave the negative responses “not really” and “not at all” stated that academic writing in English at university was difficult for them because they were not used to it as they hardly had any practice with it. Table 12 below shows quotations that were given as reasons for the negative responses they had given in the closed apart of question 9a.

**Table 12: Showing a recap of the responses of four student’s with extreme negative perceptions towards writing essays in English.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salomon</td>
<td>“I have never written an academic essay and the LLH assignment is my first one. It is hard for me. I lack the ability to express myself in English academic texts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shona</td>
<td>“I think it’s still quite hard for me to write in academic English as I haven’t had a lot of practice” I am used academic writing in Spanish.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“I have more trouble with writing than with reading. All my lessons at secondary school, about learning how to write in different styles were in French”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“I never had academic writing in ESL. So I’m not capable to do some academic writing in English. I also have a lack of vocabulary for academic writing in English”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 12, the students highlighted their lacks and insecurities with academic writing in English. The most recurring problem with all the four participants was that of not having enough practice with learning in English at academic level. The issue of student’s reading deficiencies was best analyzed in terms of Hutchinson and Waters’ (1975) needs analysis approach which gave prominence to the provision of students’
academic needs. For instance, Jane felt that she lacked sufficient vocabulary in English which is why she found it hard to write academic texts in English. Salomon actually stated that she felt she did not have the ability to express herself when writing academic texts in English. These findings confirm Hutchinson and Waters’ (1975) findings that if a huge gap between existing proficiency and the target proficiency of learners, they are likely to face problems with academic literacy hence the need to address their needs, lacks and wants so as to facilitate effective English academic literacy.

**Question 10: To whom do you write your assignments?**

All the 23 students stated that they wrote their assignments specifically for the professors of specific courses. They noted that they only wrote academic texts to get their grades and nothing else. They wrote their essays to show their teachers that they would have understood a certain concept or topic. They view their language proficiencies as not sufficient enough to make them write English academic papers which can be said to be innovative in the discipline on applied linguistics. This shows that the students are not confident enough when it comes to academic writing in English. A needs analysis shows that the students lack practise and exposure in using EAP when writing at academic level. Thus, they need more exposure to it if they are to become effective writers in English at academic level.

**Question 11: What issues do you take into account while writing your assignments?**

All 23 students raised the issue of not knowing the proper citation and referencing conventions that are used for English assignments in the discipline of applied linguistics. They said that they were not explicitly taught of the citation and referencing formats acceptable for use in the applied linguistics domain and because of this they lacked
proper referencing skills. They said that different lecturers of their major subjects tend to have different referencing formats and this poses as a problem when they write assignments from the minor as they will not be sure of which conventions to use. 14 students mentioned that they lacked the knowledge of organising their ideas to come up with structured academic arguments when writing academic essays. Four students managed to mention the use of topic sentences but they said that they knew it from the English classes which they majored in.

18 students who studied in languages other than English mentioned that they did not know the steps to consider when writing an English assignment apart from following instructions of essay questions. These findings which reflect on the students’ academic writing needs confirm with the sociocultural approach which states that if students are not properly oriented with the writing conventions of a given discourse community, they are likely to face problems whenever they write essays related to that domain. Thus, for students to be effective writers in English at university level, they need to be well-informed on issues relating to EAP, in particular academic writing in English.

**Question 12: Do you consider yourself as a member of the academic community whenever you write in English?**

The responses to this question were 4, 3% for Quite a lot, 8, 7% So-so, 4, 3% Not really and 82, 6% Not at all (See Table 13).

**Table: 13 showing responses to whether or not students viewed themselves as belonging to the English dominated discourse community of applied linguistics.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So so</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3% of the students opted for the answer “Quite a lot”. They said they felt that reading topics within the discipline of applied linguistics made them members of that academic community as they usually had to read, understand and give their own interpretations of what they would have read. The 8.7% who took the middle position “so-so” said they were not quite sure if they considered themselves to be members of the applied linguistics discourse community. Another 4.3% as shown in Figure 10 below chose “Not really” and stated that there was need for them to be familiarised with the writing conventions required for use when writing English academic texts.
Figure 10: Showing students responses to whether or not they considered themselves as part of the applied linguistics academic discourse community whenever they wrote assignments in English.

82.6% of students who chose the option “Not at all”, as seen in Figure 10 above, cited insecurities based on unfamiliarity with the writing practises associated with the use of EAP. The students felt excluded from the discipline of Applied Linguistics which is why they felt comfortable with the discourse communities where they only used their minority languages as mediums of instruction. They said they considered themselves as peripheral in terms of identifying themselves with the discipline of Applied Linguistics as they only studied it as a minor course. This finding contradicts with Gao (2007) who states that for students to effectively contribute to the activities of a discourse community, they need to identify fully with that discourse community and be aware of the conventions agreed upon by members of that domain. Since the students do not identify themselves with the
Applied Linguistics domain due to their unfamiliarity with the discipline’s practices, they were bound to have problems with using EAP.

The students further claimed that they could not consider themselves as members of the Applied Linguistics discourse community as their English vocabulary was very limited. They argued that there was a huge gap in terms of proficiency between themselves and the authors of the English textbooks they read for the minor course. According to the sociocultural theory, for students to have a sense of belonging to a particular discourse community, there is need for them be familiar with the conventions and language practices agreed upon in a particular discourse domain. This observation is in line with the findings of a research done by Zuengler & Miller (2006) in which contextual conventions were found to be fundamental to learning.

The students mentioned that since they were used to writing in their minorities, they faced problems with expressing themselves in a way that was considered academic in English. They said they needed to know the aspects which made a piece of English written work to be considered highly academic.

**Question 13: Do you consider yourself as contributing any new information to your area of study whenever you engage in assignment writing?**

The results reveal that 17, 4% of the students thought they felt as if they contributed new information whilst 82, 6% thought they did not contribute any new information towards the discipline of linguistics. See Table 14 below.
Table 14: Showing the students’ responses when asked if they felt as if they contributed any new information whenever they wrote assignments in the field of linguistics in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The diagram in Figure 11 below is a visual representation of the results in Table 14.

Figure 11: Showing the visual results of the responses of students when they were asked if they felt as if they contributed any new information whenever they wrote assignments in the field of linguistics in English
82, 6% mentioned that they felt as if they could not consider themselves as contributing any new information to the discipline of Applied Linguistics since they were still bachelor students who were not yet qualified enough to write publishable material. They stated that since they were minor students of Applied Linguistics, and had less experience with the use of EAP, they felt they could not contribute anything new to Applied Linguistics domain. Thus, the students underestimated their intellectual capabilities because of their insufficient English language proficiencies. Some also thought that they just read information written by already established scholars and re-produced it in their own words. By so doing they thought they did not contribute any new information.

The 17, 4% who thought they contributed new information said that they thought as much because they always gave their own interpretations and opinions whenever they read any texts in preparation for any assignment. They also claimed that they always related whatever they read with what they already knew from their past experiences. This helped them in understanding and critically evaluating, in their own views the English academic texts that they read. This observation is in line with Birch’s (2002) L2 reading model which states that readers consult their knowledge base whenever they read, evaluate or critically analyse academic texts.

4.3 From questionnaires to Language Learning Histories

The data presented from the questionnaires revealed that the undergraduate students involved in this study had both positive and negative perceptions of academic literacy in English. The questionnaire was designed to produce a quantitative representation of the
situation. The questionnaire revealed that the larger majority of undergraduate students had problems associated with academic literacy in English as a result of lack of prior exposure to the reading skills and writing conventions associated with the use of EAP for the minor course in Applied Linguistics. Accordingly, LLHs were used to carry out a qualitative in-depth analysis of the problems localized in the questionnaires.

Given each student’s consent (see Appendix 2 for consent form), four language learning histories were analyzed in this study. The four students who had extreme negative perceptions towards the use of EAP had their LLHs examined on the basis of a needs analysis, in particular “lacks”, that was carried out on their open ended responses to questions 1b and 9b of the questionnaire (see Tables 2 and 3 for the responses). The four students were given the pseudo names Salomon, Shona, Mary and Jane in order to maintain their privacy. The four narratives were discussed at length in sections 4.4.1, 4.4.2, 4.4.3 and 4.4.4 respectively.

It is from each student’s responses to the two open ended questions 1b and 9b of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) that their lacks and insecurities of using EAP were noted. As reflected in the responses highlighted in Tables 2 and 3, Salomon had negative perceptions towards reading and writing in English because of lacking practice with using EAP. In actual fact, she stated that the LLH assignment which she had written for the minor course was her first assignment to be written in English at university level and consequently she lacked the ability to express her opinions in English. Salomon was bound to face problems with using EAP as a result of lacking sufficient English vocabulary and knowledge of academic writing conventions.
Shona, another student, mentioned that she did not enjoy reading and writing in English because she was used to reading and writing in Spanish. The use of Spanish as a language of instruction in her major course substantiated the idea that she lacked experience with using EAP. A needs analysis shows that Shona’s lack of experience with using EAP was one of the reasons why she had extreme negative perceptions towards both reading and writing in English.

Jane, as reflected in her responses in Tables 2 and 3, also had negative perceptions towards the use of EAP. This was because she had problems with understanding long English sentences and lacked sufficient vocabulary in English as a result of having had little exposure to reading academic texts written in English. A needs analysis reveals that since reading is a skilled behavior, as noted by Grabe (2000), there was need for Jane to attain the necessary metacognitive skills needed for her to be able to identify words and understand complex English sentences when reading English written academic texts from Applied Linguistics. The fact that she had to pause frequently and wrestle over the meaning of English phrases shows that her reading was not skilled. Thus, for Jane to have been able to improve her efficacy in using EAP, she needed to have been explicitly taught about the cognitive and metacognitive reading skills that are necessary for use when reading English books and articles for disciplines such as Applied Linguistics.

Jane needed to have been exposed to a variety of comprehensible English academic texts from Applied Linguistics, which were comprehensible enough to allow her to draw her past experiences and use them to master new material written in English. It was of little use for her to have been given material that was beyond her comprehension level when
she was just starting out to learn the rudiments of Applied Linguistics. What we learn from Jane and Shona’s experiences so far is that prospective undergraduate minor students of the minor course in Applied Linguistics needed to be introduced to the language and concepts of Applied Linguistics, to increase their content schemata, before proceeding to the more advanced areas of the discipline.

In Tables 2 and 3, Mary who was used to studying in French mentioned that she had more problems with writing compared to reading in English because she was never taught how to write academic texts in English at university level. Thus, she lacked proper knowledge of the procedures which needed to be followed if one was to write a structured academic essay in a standardized manner that was required for use by the discipline of Applied Linguistics.

As shown in the responses, to questions 1b and 9b of the questionnaire, the four Salomon, Shona, Mary and Jane had negative perceptions towards academic literacy in English. Accordingly, the four students LLHs were chosen for analysis on the basis of their extreme negative perceptions and academic literacy deficiencies which were realized as “lacks” following codes from needs analysis. LLHs on a qualitative level were meant to elicit personal information from the students about their attitudes towards learning the English language before high school, during high school and their prospects with the use of English after graduating from university. The researcher thought that students with negative perceptions towards academic literacy in English would have interesting stories to tell about their linguistic and academic literacy development which could be of great value in addressing the main research problem of this current study.
In summary, questionnaires were used to gain insight into the situation from a quantitative point of view whilst LLHs were cumulatively administered to qualitatively carry out an in-depth analysis of the issues localized in the questionnaires. LLHs were meant to reflect on the history of each student’s language learning needs and experiences over the years, English language attitudes and expectations, focus, complications as well as future English language related goals after university. The LLHs which were gathered from the four students following their reflections to Murphey et al’s (2004) original questions for narrative analysis (see Figure 3), provided the researcher with personal details pertaining to each student’s language and academic literacy development, something which could not have been achieved through the use of questionnaires alone.

### 4.4 Analysis of LLHs

Four LLHs belonging to Salomon, Shona, Mary and Jane were chosen for analysis. This section looked at each learner’s characteristics and linguistic background in reflection to Murphey et al’s (2004) original instructions for narrative analysis (see Figure 4). Figure 12 below contains a recap of the emergent codes and their antecedents which are ‘necessities, needs and wants’ from needs analysis which were used in the analysis of each of the four LLHs.
Figure 12: Showing a recap of the emergent codes and how they are linked to their antecedents from Needs Analysis.

As shown in Figure 12 above, three codes from needs analysis (necessities, lacks and wants together with eight other emerging codes) were used to analyse the four LLHs. All the eleven codes (necessities; interference, exposure, lacks; complications, self-enrolment, attitudes, expectations, wants; focus and solutions) used in the analysis of LLHs were defined in 3.4.2.2. Explanations justifying how the eight emergent codes (interference, exposure, complications, self-enrolment, attitudes, expectations, focus and solutions) were linked to their antecedents (necessities, lacks and wants) from needs analysis were also provided in 3.4.2.2. The use of the eleven codes in Figure 12 was ideal as it enabled the researcher to address a wide range of issues thereby facilitating a thorough
analysis of each student’s LLH (see Appendix 3 for sample of Shona’s coded LLH which was used in this study).

In the analysis of the four LLHs that were chosen for analysis, the researcher made reference to some direct quotations from each student’s LLH. It is important to note that the quotations which were used in this section appeared the same as they were written by the students in their original LLHs and consequently did not contain any grammatical alterations.

4.4.1 Salomon’s confirmation interview blended with her LLH

This section analyzed Salomon’s LLH with the intention of gaining an in-depth analysis into the origins of the negative perceptions towards reading and writing, that had been reflected in her questionnaire and her possible solutions to the problems she had raised. This section also reported on the data gathered from Salomon’s confirmation interview which was carried out to reflect on critical issues which had been raised from her LLH. The confirmation interview was carried out in order to clarify issues which had been vaguely addressed in the LLH, such as what she meant exactly when she referred herself as ‘lacking grammar’. The interview was also carried out to validate whether the interpretations which had been done to Salomon’s LLH precisely represented her intended thoughts. Salomon’s confirmation interview was carried out following Gimenez in (Litosseliti: 2010) who mentioned that texts chosen for analysis in any narrative study should be endorsed by those involved in producing and consuming all the texts analyzed. At the end of the interview Salomon confirmed that the interpretations of her LLH, which
the researcher had sent to her as an email attachment one week before the interview, were authentic. Thus, the results from Salomon’s LLH and her confirmation interview were blended together so as to present a cumulative yet concise account of her linguistic and academic literacy development in English, and how her past experiences with the English language influenced her perceptions towards the use of EAP.

Unfortunately Salomon was the only student, out of the four who’s LLHs were analyzed, who responded to an announcement which was posted on Nestor (the University of Groningen’s learning electronic channel) by the researcher to all the four students, seeking appointments with them for the interviews. The other three Shona, Mary and Jane did not respond. Nevertheless, a recap of the questions which were asked in Salomon’s interview is as follows;

- You said you learnt the production of English words in primary school, was there any element of grammar? at 01:27 minutes- listen to Appendix 5
- How did you learn and cope with grammar in high school? at 02:48 minutes
- Do you feel like you know all the procedures needed when writing academic texts in English? at 09:27 minutes
- What would you like to learn about writing skills (What do you consider as grammar)? at 09:40 minutes
- Do you approve of the interpretations done to your LLH by the researcher? at 15:10 minutes

The first question in Murphey et al’s (2004) original instructions for narrative analysis (see Figure 2) centred on how students learned English during the period before high school. Salomon, a 20 year old female whose nationality and first language was Dutch stated that her English lessons at primary school focused on the production of simple English words. She reported as follows;
“I had my first English lesson when I was in “groep 7” in primary school. This was just a very simple lesson, but it helped me to learn basic English words like “hello” and “how are you” (Salomon) Quotation 1

Salomon showed that the only aspect of language that was considered a necessity in primary school was the production of common English words. Salomon did not give much detail pertaining to her learning of English during her primary school days as she mentioned that there was not much learning of English which went on in primary school apart from learning common words.

It was at high school when she realised that there was a shift of interest regarding the teaching approaches and the English language aspects that were emphasised on. She mentioned that;

*We only had a few hours a week English lessons, so it was very difficult to develop my English fast, but during those hours. The most important area which was taught was grammar. We repeated it very often*” (Salomon) Quotation 2

The quotation showed that there was a sudden need for the knowledge of grammar in high school as reflected by the frequency it was taught. Salomon stated that although they were engaged in various activities during their English lessons in high school, grammar was the most taught. The researcher, during the analysis of the LLH, actually did not understand what exactly Salomon meant when she referred to ‘lacking grammar’. As a
result, the researcher decided to carry out an interview with Salomon so as to gain further insights on the issue of grammar which she had raised in her LLH. In the interview (listen to Appendix 4) Salomon stated that by referring to the word grammar, she meant the rules that governed the English language.

The researcher, in the confirmation interview, proceeded to ask Salomon how she coped with grammar lessons in high school considering that she had not been exposed to any lessons about the rules governing the English language, in primary school. Salomon mentioned that the teachers who taught English grammar in high school actually made reference to Dutch grammatical examples as aids in the teaching of English grammar. Salomon confirmed that reference to Dutch grammatical examples during the learning of English grammar made her understand the English language rules better.

When the researcher asked Salomon if she knew about the procedures which needed to be considered when writing an English academic essay, Salomon mentioned that she had no idea about any L2 writing procedures as she was not familiar with using EAP. However, Salomon mentioned that the most important aspect of writing that she still felt as if she needed to be taught was the rules of the English language, and how to comprehend English texts. Salomon stated that the problem of not being able to extract specific information from English written texts had actually started in high school and the problem persisted until university level. She reported as follows;
“I’m capable of reading texts in English and I understand the meaning of it, but I find it very difficult to answer questions about English texts” (Salomon) Quotation 4

Quotation 4 showed that although Salomon could read and recognize most of the words in an English text at university level, she still could not locate specific information in a text as she lacked the skills to do so. At university, Salomon had the need to know the appropriate academic literacy skills that she had to use so as to be able to identify information when reading texts in English. Grabe (2002) mentioned that there were metacognitive as well cognitive skills which students needed to know if they were to understand the general meaning of English texts at university level. What we learned from Salomon’s case was that metacognitive skills, such as recognising words and understanding sentences in an English text at academic level, were not sufficient on their own without the use of cognitive skills such as scanning and skimming. This observation was in line with Birch’s (2002) reading model which stated that reading at academic level was a process which involved the interactive use of metacognitive skills, cognitive skills as well as reference to the knowledge base. In this regard, it was important to make sure that undergraduate students were equipped with comprehensible reading material. BA students needed to be motivated by the desire to understand the reading material in English, so comprehension, as one of the facets of reading, had to be considered of major importance as this aided students to reflect on their knowledge base.
Salomon mentioned that she was pessimistic about her English proficiency at university level. She reported that;

*I noticed that it is more difficult for me now to express myself or write something in English, because I have all these French words in my head*” (Salomon) *Quotation 5*

According to de Bot et al’s (2005) dynamic model of the mental lexicon, words which were used more often were activated easily and appeared to have more association with other words, similar to them, in the mental lexicon. In this respect, English words that were mostly used by students when they wrote academic texts in English tended to activate associations with French words which were similar to the English words that were frequently used. This proved to cause *complications* and made it difficult for students to avoid making reference to the L1 whilst writing in L2 as the students had no control over the process of ‘activation’ and ‘association’ (de Bot et al: 2005)

Salomon in quotation 6 stated that writing in English became more difficult as she ended up mixing up French words with English words whenever she could not identify an English word. She mentioned as follows;

“At this moment, we do not any lessons in English (except the minor of course). I don’t like to have more lessons in English, because I study French. When I will have more lessons in English it will be confusing. The only thing that annoys me is that I always come up with a French word when I can’t find an English word. So it becomes difficult to make the step from French from French to English.” (Salomon) *Quotation 6*
Salomon showed that studying in two languages at university level could be really confusing as the learner was supposed to be equally competent in both languages which resulted in interference between two languages of instruction. The last statement in quotation 6 revealed that Salomon’s knowledge of French actually resulted in interference whenever she attempted to write in English. As noted by Lawless (2008) French as a language had a great number of its words and expressions borrowed by English. The interference of English and French was best analyzed using Wardhaugh’s (1970) moderate version of contrastive analysis which views similarities between languages as a source of confusion and interference as bilingual students, in this case a speaker of French and English, tended to mix-up the two languages during the learning process because they contained similar elements. Interference was also highlighted in quotation 1 when Salomon used the Dutch expression “groep 7” in an English assignment. Thus, because Salomon received instruction in French for her major courses and in Dutch and English for her minor in Applied Linguistics, she experienced interference between English, Dutch and French which made it hard to write solely in English without activating French and Dutch words in her head.

Salomon also mentioned that she had problems with shifting her mind set towards using EAP. She reported as follows;
However, it is difficult to start writing in English, because I have to make all my other assignments in French, so it is very confusing to start an assignment in English.”

(Salomon) Quotation 7

Salomon actually did not have any plans of furthering her English, but the advice that she gave to future students was that

“Keep on practising your English, even when you study another language. English will always stay an important language, so I think it’s important to remain your English” The only thing that annoys me is that I always come up with a French word when I can’t find an English word. So it becomes difficult to make the step from English to French.”

(Salomon) Quotation 8

Salomon mentioned that the best solution to academic literacy problems in English, was constant practice. She advised other students to keep on practising reading and writing in English from a young age, as she realised that it was necessary even for students who only intend to study languages like French and Spanish. In the same vein, since academic literacy skills were not acquired but learnt, she said it was also important for minor courses, such as the one from Applied Linguistics, to teach English academic literacy skills to students so that they do not struggle much with reading texts and writing essays in English in their second year of university, given their lack of exposure in using EAP.

4.4.2 Shona
Shona, a Peruvian lady to whom Spanish was her first language whilst English was her second, voluntarily started her first English lesson when she was 7 years old. She viewed herself as having had a neutral attitude towards English during this age as it was not spoken that much in her home community, Peru. A needs analysis done to her formative years revealed that English was not much of a necessity for one to study effectively in a Peruvian primary school since the main language of instruction was Spanish.

“Finishing Primary School I had very basic level of English. My native language is Spanish and the importance of English wasn’t very high” (Shona) Quotation 1

Since Shona had limited knowledge of the English language, she had no expectations of learning English for any other purposes in primary school apart from knowing how to pronounce English colour names, and members of the family among others. According to Shona, there was no need for learning the formal aspects of the English language in primary school given the fact that Spanish was the main language of instruction which was used in the education domain in Peru. The fact that Spanish was the main language of instruction that was used in Peru, was one of the reasons why Shona claimed not to be familiar with the use of English for educational purposes as she lacked both the exposure and a proper foundation in reading and writing in English. Exposure to reading and writing in English is considered by (Kasangana: 2006) as fundamental to the creation of a firm foundation for L2 proficiency. It is evident from Shona’s account of her English language learning history, that there was only the need for the production of common English words during her formative years.
It appeared as if the way Shona was taught English during her secondary school years and the nature of the aspects which they learnt was quite different from her primary school experiences with learning English. There appeared to be a \textit{complication} when Shona realised a sudden change in English language teaching methods between primary school learning and high school learning.

"\textit{In high school I continued my English lessons. I now had two hours a week English lessons. The level of English was a bit higher now. By means of a book we learned to describe normal daily situations. Most of the things mentioned in the book that we used were English songs and words showing how to describe daily situations"}. (\textit{Shona})

\textbf{Quotation 2}

In high school, Shona realised a \textit{complication} in that the language used was a bit challenging. The level of difficulty of the aspects that were taught in high school became a complication in that they were beyond her comprehension as she could not read effectively in English. Shona noticed a difference between the nature of the English language aspects that she learnt in primary school and that which she was taught in secondary school. Since she had not had much reading experience during her primary school learning, reading in English appeared to be quite a complication as she lacked reading practise. In high school, Shona realised a new need for her to know how to read as the teachers used information from books to teach descriptive words and songs in English. However, real information exchange in English was limited amongst her peers at secondary school as all of them did not have sufficient vocabulary to carry out meaningful conversations. Hence, they would speak in Spanish as always, with no
pressure of speaking in English at all since using it to communicate in Peru, was not a necessity.

“Although during primary school and high school, I acquired very little knowledge of English. I did not experience this as a deficiency. In my country, Peru, Spanish is the main language and therefore one does not experience problems when not speaking English” (Shona) Quotation 3

After Shona finished her high school she wanted to improve her English language proficiency. In order to do so, she self enrolled herself for an English course at a university language centre in her home country Peru.

“This was an intensive course of about five hours a week which I took for about two years. The material we used was from the University of Cambridge, England. Now I finally could learn about English grammar and I extending my vocabulary. There was a special book for exercises about grammar. It was hard learning grammar, I kept on learning. However, I concluded the course with a certificate. After finishing the course I enrolled for classes in French” (Shona) Quotation 4

After her high school, Shona realised a new need for the knowledge of English grammar as she intended to apply for admission to an undergraduate programme at a university which required proof of having written and passed an approved English test. Applying for admission at university was one of the reasons why Shona self-enrolled herself for the
Cambridge First Certificate in English. Shona also involved herself in the intensive two year English course because she felt as if she lacked the knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary of which the only solution, she thought, of addressing her deficiencies was enrolling for the crash course.

As shown the third statement in quotation 4, it is evident that Shona wanted to improve her English vocabulary language base so as to facilitate effective reading of academic texts written in English. Language and reading were inter-related in that as Salomon’s reading would improve with the discovery of new words to her, so would her language competence. Grammar was also a necessity in the Cambridge English language examination that she self-enrolled after high-school. The students were taught about the rules of English through writing exercises extracted from a grammar book.

Enrolling for the English course enabled Shona to improve her English language proficiency, even though her main focus was to study Spanish at the University of Groningen. She knew that it was a necessity for her to be able to read and write in English because a certificate showing that she had been tested on reading and writing in English was a requirement for her to be admitted for study at the University of Groningen. However, Shona did not disclose the mark that she got when she wrote the Cambridge First Certificate in English.

Shona, at the end of quotation 4 also stated that she enrolled for French classes after she had completed her two year English language course. This shows that Shona had an
interest in languages in general. The idea of learning a third language (French) before fully developing her second one (English), however, raises a **complication** as she started learning another language before fully mastering the English language.

The perception that she found English grammar very challenging (see quotation 4) supports the available research, which tends to confirm the existence of a critical period in language acquisition (Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

Shona clearly had a high **expectation** of the level of English offered at most Dutch universities in the Netherlands even though she intended on studying Spanish. She explained as follows;

“*I came to Netherlands in 2004 and after a few years I started my studies of Romance Languages and Cultures in Groningen. In this studies my home language is Spanish and therefore I do not have need for the use of English. I know that the level of English in high schools in the Netherlands is quite high. So I expected the level of English education in University would be high as well. In my minor course I have to use English at a higher level, which is something I am not used to. In my major course I have only read one English book on “The development of theatre from ancient Greeks until modern times”. In this minor course I am made to read a lot of English academic texts books which is very challenging looking at my English level.”* (Shona) **Quotation 5**
The above statement revealed Shona’s expectations of academic literacy in English at the University of Groningen. She perceived and still perceives reading and writing academic texts in English as very difficult probably as a result of her limited exposure to the use of EAP. Her viewing reading and writing in English as difficult results in her having negative attitudes towards the use of EAP. Shona went on to mention a want, which she thought would make her academic life of using EAP, better.

“Since I am studying Roman Languages and Cultures, I would like to be able to have all the classes in Spanish. Now it is a mixture of Dutch, Spanish and English which is confusing. In some courses one needs a good level of English. Sometimes textbooks are in English, which you have to understand in order to pass exams” (Shona) Quotation 6

The above statement showed that Shona was not comfortable with learning in different languages at university level especially those in which she was not proficient in, such as English. She also found it confusing to learn in two languages for one course as there was interference between the languages. Interference between the use of Spanish and English during the learning process was possible as Colorado (1997) mentions that there are many similarities which exist between Spanish and English. The similarities range from word level to syntactic level. Through the use of Wardhaugh’s (1970) moderate version of contrastive analysis which stated that similarities between languages is a source of confusion, it could be understood why Shona did not prefer receiving instruction in many languages such as Spanish and English. Accordingly, she mentioned that if she had had
an opportunity of studying in English only it would have been a perfect way for her to improve her English proficiency.

“If I were to study English at University level, I would very much like to have all classes in English. This would be perfect environment to develop my English and take it to a higher level. It would also be recommendable to have some native speaking professors.”

(Shona) Quotation 7

Shona’s reflection of learning solely in English revealed that she thought she could never develop her English language abilities if she kept on learning in multiple languages which included Dutch, Spanish and English as she feared that these languages would interfere with each other during the learning process. For Shona, the only solution to the problem of language interference was to study in one language. Shona’s reflection of learning solely in English with the intention of improving her cognitive academic literacy proficiency, contradicted with Cummins (1981) who mentioned that in order to improve students’ Cognitive/ Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), students were supposed to be exposed to both their first and second languages equally. Cummins’ (1981) observation suggested that since Shona’s first language was used as a form of instruction in the academic domain it could be used as an aid in teaching her how to use EAP so as to avoid interference.

A solution that Salomon gave in quotation 7, involved the hiring of English native speaking professors to lecture some parts of course. Shona’s suggestion revealed that students could be motivated to learn if ideal role models, such as native speakers of
English, were provided. Shona thought that it was necessary for native speaking teachers to teach courses which had elements of English instruction in them, as their accents were easy to understand compared to being taught by non-English native teachers who spoke Dutch as their L1. Shona’s suggestion insinuates that teachers with Dutch as their L1 spoke English with a Dutch accent which made it hard to comprehend what they said during lectures. Shona also mentioned the vocabulary which the teachers used were sometimes very complicated for her, to such an extent that she needed to record the lectures for future replay.

“Although I did an intensive course in English, it was a long time ago. I now experience little difficulty with using English. This concerns as well listening as reading and writing. I use a sound recorder to grab the lectures for further use later on. With the use of dictionaries and the internet I fairly manage writing and reading.” (Shona) Quotation 8

Shona revealed that the intensive English course that she took prior to her admission to university might have improved her proficiency. However, the intensive course did not teach her academic literacy skills, which is the reason why she resorted to finding solutions about her academic literacy problems from the internet. For Shona to have been able to effectively used EAP, she needed to be taught the essential academic literacy skills which enabled undergraduate students to read and write effectively in English, in a convention that was acceptable to the Applied Linguistics academic domain. Often, it is believed by scholars such as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) that when students show lack of proficiency in their second language of instruction, in this case English, it is to be solved by focusing on their possible areas of weakness. Once these weaknesses were
identified, through a needs analysis such as the one done in this study, teachers could actually develop EAP curricula which addressed the academic literacy problems prevalent to particular groups of students, in particular, those who were not used to receiving instruction in English at an academic level.

Shona heralded the learning approaches that were used in the minor course in Applied Linguistics. She noted that although they were not explicitly taught about academic literacy skills in English, the course had a learner centred approach towards learning.

“I think that the way of studying English here is a very active way. This means that one has to take an active part in learning by entering in conversations, reading books, interact with the lecturer in English. It is a more practical way of learning” Quotation 9

As reflected in the above quotation, Shona also saw the minor course as a way of improving her proficiency in English as it involved students’ through active participation. Shona’s observation is in line with proponents of the task-based approach to language learning and teaching, such as Ellis (2003), who stated that it was necessary to involve students in the learning process by giving them task-based reading activities which were meant to develop certain schemata and learning strategies such as skimming, scanning and note-taking among others. Ellis’ (2003) observation shows how L2 reading can be valid both for comprehension and for introducing new materials.
Shona mentioned that she still felt the need to improve her English speaking skills. She concluded by hinting that she planned on going to Britain after graduating from university, where she could meet native speakers of English who could help her realise her goal of being a fluent English language speaker. Shona’s advice to future students is as follows;

“I would like to advise future students to prepare themselves by taking language courses in for example Great Britain. Experiencing the language in a native environment prior to entering higher education will bring more success to finishing a study in English”

Quotation 10

Shona greatly valued interaction with the native speakers of English as a way of improving one’s English language proficiency. The previous solutions that Shona offered were also helpful in addressing the reading and writing problems identified. A summary of Shona’s solutions to the problems associated with academic literacy in English include; the use of one language to teach the minor course in order to avoid the interference of languages; the provision of guest teachers who speak English as their native language; recording lectures taught in English and listening to them again and again to enhance effective comprehension, the use of the dictionary during the reading process although it did not always offer the equivalent meaning, and enrolling for English language courses in countries like Britain, which spoke English as a native language.

What was learned from Shona’s LLH was that students’ language needs were dynamic as they changed over time depending on environment and context of study. As highlighted
in her LLH, her formative years reflected the need for the production of common words, her high school and post high school years before university reflected on the need for her to improve her grammar (although she did not clearly define what she meant by grammar) and vocabulary growth. Her university years reflected on the need for her to learn academic literacy skills whilst her post university ambitions reflected on the need for her to improve her English fluency through the speech form. It was also gathered that Shona’s attitude towards learning in English also change over time as a result of the negative and positive experiences that she faced during her academic literacy development. The following section analyzes Mary’s LLH.

4.4.3 Mary’s LLH

Mary was a 22 year old Dutch nationality who started learning English at the age of 9 when she lived in France. She confessed that she personally had a positive attitude towards learning English in primary school, which was not common to most of her peers in France.

“In France they are not very good at English so I was one of the best of my class”.

(Mary) Quotation 1

Mary mentioned that her primary school years were characterised by learning how to produce simple English words. Thus, there was a need for the ability to produce words during her primary school years. However, she was exposed to a lot of English native speakers at her French home as her father who was a painter, had English speaking clients who would occasionally visit. Accordingly, her English speaking skills improved
a lot. Mary further mentioned that since she was one of the best students of English in her primary school in France, she had represented her school in several English speaking competitions. Mary moved to Holland when she was around 14 years. On her arrival, she had a complication as she realised that her English speaking and writing skills (which were considered good in France) were of no match compared to the standards in Holland.

“in Holland it is a totally different system and the English level was a lot higher. That was when I experienced that my English wasn’t that good as I thought it was. I had a negative experience because I went from very good grades to bad grades” (Mary) Quotation 2

Mary highlighted a complication resulting from the difference in interests and approaches to teaching English language that existed between French and Holland schools.

Il had difficulties with the English in HVO because the grammar was very important at the school in Holland and I did not have much grammar in France” (Mary) Quotation 3

The statement in quotation 3 showed that when Mary came to Holland, she realised a new need for English grammar, of which grammar had not been a necessity in her French primary education. When Mary finished high school, she only wanted to focus on studying French as her experience with English grammar in HAVO had made her doubt her capabilities of using English for educational purposes. Mary, however, did not define what exactly she meant by term grammar. Nevertheless, her experience with grammar in
HAVO triggered a shift in her attitude towards learning in English, from a positive attitude in primary school to a negative attitude in both high school and university. She mentioned as follows;

“When I was in my last year I finished secondary school English with a very good grade but my goal was studying French, so I did not have any expectations for learning in English” (Mary) Quotation 4

Mary mentioned that when she was admitted to university, she had no expectations of ever learning in English as she lacked sufficient knowledge of the language which is why she opted to major in French, a language she had so much experience with. However, when she was enrolled for the minor course in Applied Linguistics, she realised that the use of English in HAVO was different from the use of EAP at university level. Mary highlighted that she had never had any exposure to EAP until she had to read academic articles and written an academic assignment in English for the minor course in Applied Linguistics.

“At higher education I did not have any experience with English until now” (Mary) Quotation 5

Mary’s insufficient exposure to academic literacy skills explained why she had extreme negative perceptions towards the use of EAP. She was never taught academic literacy skills on inception to university. Mary’s lack of knowledge about English academic literacy skills in her second year of study at the University of Groningen (just like
Salomon) was a true testimony of the underestimation of the need for the provision of academic literacy skills to undergraduate students at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

When Mary was enrolled for the minor course in Applied Linguistics, she realised the need for her to be aware of the academic literacy skills used when reading and writing texts in English at university. However, she went on to mention that she had no problems with listening to English lectures. Her major problem concerned writing academic assignments. This was why she had to use the English dictionary often as she had a limited vocabulary count in English.

“I did not have any difficulties following what the teacher was saying in class. However, for this LLH assignment I overused 7 times the dictionary to search for English words” (Mary) Quotation 6

Mary expressed that she did not prefer receiving instruction in multiple languages such as she feared them interfering with each other.

“To be honest, I would not like to have all classes in English because I already have them in French and I am afraid that it will get all mixed up. Because of the intense French I learn I am not very occupied with learning English” (Mary) Quotation 7

Students like Mary whose learning preference or want was to learn solely in languages other than English, feared that learning in multiple languages such as French and English
would result in interference between languages. As noted by Lawless (2008) French as a language had a great number of its words and expressions borrowed by English. The interference of English and French was best analyzed using Wardhaugh’s (1970) moderate version of contrastive analysis which viewed similarities between languages as a source of confusion as bilingual students, in this case speakers of French and English, tended to mix the two languages up during the learning process because the languages contained similar elements.

Mary proceeded to state that she wanted to be certain of whether or not the sentences she wrote in English were grammatical. She did not state what she meant by grammar. Mary mentioned that she usually just resorted to guessing whether or not the sentences she wrote in English were in correct grammatical form, as a result, she felt insecure whenever she wrote in English.

“But the areas still that want to improve in are grammar because I write down how I think it is but I am not sure about it, so I would learn more so that I can be certain of what I am writing” (Mary) Quotation 8

The statement in quotation 8 revealed that Mary was not aware of the proper writing conventions that governed academic literacy in English. From a sociocultural perspective, it was essential that students were made aware of the writing conventions used in a given community of practice if they were to effectively write in English.
Mary advised students to practise individual reading and writing in English so as to perfect their academic literacy skills. The solution that she provided to prospective students, who were used to receiving instruction in languages other than English, was that they needed to practise reading in English more often so as to address the areas they had problems with. She mentioned that if one had problems with identifying genre specific English words then he/she needed to practice reading comprehensible English books more often, with the aid of a dictionary although they were not guaranteed of precisely accurate definitions which suited the context it would have been used by the author. If one had problems with reading syntactic structures, then they also needed to practice reading academic books written in English. Through the analysis of Mary’s LLH, we learned that attitude towards the English language was dynamic and determined by the experiences which students went through during their academic literacy development. It was also gathered that students’ language and academic literacy needs were also dynamic and changed over time as a result of sociocultural factors such as context or nature and level of study. Mary began her formative years with the need for word production. It was in at secondary level that she realised the need for grammar and at university level that she realised the need to possess academic literacy skills in English. Thus, it would be helpful for teachers to cater for students’ needs and demands at every level of the learning process so as to enhance their language and academic literacy development in English.

4.4.4 Jane’s LLH
Jane was a 19 year old girl whose nationality and first language was Dutch. Jane stated that when she was growing up she had a negative attitude towards English.

“I have always loved to learn foreign languages, except English. So it is quite striking that I just have to write my English” (Jane) Quotation 1

She began her narrative by citing her struggles with self-confidence whenever she wrote in English.

“But maybe it is also the most interesting one of all my language learning histories: it is a story about ups and downs and especially about my struggle for self-confidence” (Jane) Quotation 2

The quotation above showed that learning in English had not been easy for Jane as she struggled with self-confidence whenever she wrote in English as a result of not being used to reading and writing in English.

In primary school, Jane mentioned that she remembered writing a few short stories in English; however, the teachers were not much concerned with grammar as they had a great interest in the need to focus on phatic word production. Nevertheless, Jane acknowledged that she had a lack of vocabulary in English when she entered high school. She reported;
“For instance, in my first grades of secondary school my vocabulary was too small to reach the reading and listening level I ought to reach.” (Jane) Quotation 3

The statement in quotation 7 showed that Jane had not been exposed to a lot of reading and writing in English when she was in primary school which is why she had a low vocabulary count in English when she entered high school. At high school, she realised a sudden need to expand her English vocabulary so she involved herself in self initiated reading of English books, in her spare time. She stated that self-initiated reading had a positive effect on her vocabulary growth although she still remained insecure about her English language proficiency and capabilities.

Jane cited a complication in high school when she mentioned that whilst her marks for listening and reading improved, her writing deteriorated.

“While my marks for listening and reading tests increased, my marks for writing tests unfortunately decreased. I don’t really know why, but I think I struggled too much with grammar” (Jane) Quotation 4

The phrase above showed that Jane had problems with English grammar which was the main reason why her writing deteriorated in high school as she had had no exposure to grammar classes before. Jane, just like Salomon and Mary, had not defined what exactly she meant by the term grammar in her LLH. Nevertheless, her lack of the knowledge of
grammar in high school was the reason why she could not construct her own creative sentences.

“The few essays that I wrote in high school were made up of sentences that were reproductions of learned sentences. This was because; I could not get a grip of grammar as we were only taught it a few times” (Jane) Quotation 5

The phrase above raised a new kind of need which she realised when she entered high school, that of English grammar. Her insufficient knowledge of grammar prevented her from writing creative sentences which resulted in her memorising and reproducing sentences she would have read from books. This was sort of a writing strategy that she had to resort to as she had no knowledge of grammar or how to construct meaningful sentences in English. Thus, the need to know grammar took centre stage in Jane’s high school years and her not being able to cope with it really made her struggle with self-confidence when it came to writing in English.

When Jane went to university, she had no expectations of improving her writing skills in English at all. However, after starting the minor course, she realised that the English she had been taught in high school was quite different from the English she had to read and write at university. This brought out the need for her to know academic literacy skills at university level. She mentioned that because of having Dutch language and Culture as her major for the past two years, she never had any exposure to academic literacy in English at university level.
“Its right now that I’m realising that my self-confidence in writing English has not increased: the first time that I’m writing an essay in English after passing my vwo-exams. Maybe while studying almost two years in my native language made me aware how beautiful I can express myself in Dutch and how unusual in English” (Jane) Quotation 6

The quotation above revealed how Jane came to the realisation that her self-confidence in using EAP was still low. The main cause of her self-confidence was her inability to express herself in English when writing academic essays. Jane stated that despite her English vocabulary having grown so much after high school, she still found it hard to read academic texts and write academic essays in English. She explained as follows;

“I still find academic writing in English hard despite my huge grow of my English vocabulary and the few grow of my English grammar” (Jane) Quotation 7

What we learned from Jane was that sufficient knowledge of English vocabulary only, was not enough for students to be able to effectively use EAP. Instead, there was need for students to be explicitly taught academic writing skills that would allow them to use processing strategies as well, as the use of a knowledge base on its own was insufficient. The importance of using processing strategies during L2 reading was also emphasised in Birch’s (2002) reading model (see section 1.5).
Jane had aspirations of being an academic researcher and therefore intended to improve her English writing skills. She had prospects of doing a research master immediately after her undergraduate studies. She mentioned;

“If I become a researcher it would be necessary to improve my English skills, since English is the dominating language in the academic environment. I must be able to publish in English” *(Jane) Quotation 8*

Jane mentioned that since she intended to publish in English, given the vast number of English journals that were available, she had to improve her English writing skills. Knowledge of academic literacy skills prepared the foundation for students for ambitious students like Jane to become effective future writers in English. Thus, they needed to be equipped with the proper writing skills and conventions that were agreed upon for use when writing English academic texts. What we learned from Jane, just like Salomon and Mary, was that learner needs were dynamic and at times required the students to take it upon themselves and practice self-initiated reading which was meant to improve their English proficiency levels.

The purpose of this section was to examine Salomon, Shona, Mary, Jane’s academic literacy development so as to examine how it impacted on their perceptions of the use of EAP. Issues raised by the four students were meant to provide curriculum developers and teachers, of the minor in Applied Linguistics course, with information which could help them to formulate EAP curricular that was meant to strategically and effectively cater for
students’ academic literacy deficiencies considering their varied experiences with the use of EAP, especially at tertiary level. The following is a discussion of issues that were raised in the four LLHs.

4.5 Discussion of the four LLHs

The four language learning histories analyzed in this study revealed that students’ language learning and academic literacy needs changed over time depending on the demands of any given level of study. The issue of learner needs being dynamic gave prominence to the need for teachers to take note of learner needs in cognisance to the students’ individual variation, and L1 and L2 reading and writing experiences as these, offered an insight into the students’ learning habits which they adopted at different stages of their academic literacy development. The four students whose LLHs were analyzed showed that they had more or less similar English language needs during their linguistic and academic literacy development, although some needs might have been realised earlier by others. What was most striking about the findings from the sample chosen was that all the students displayed a lack of academic literacy skills in their second year of university regardless of individual variation and academic literacy development. This brought a cause for concern as students needed to understand the instructional methods used during the learning process if these methods were to be effectively used (Hall: 1995 in Kasangana, 2006), which was not the case for the group of students involved in this study.

Although Salomon, Shona, Mary, Jane initially had varying attitudes (ranging from positive, neutral to negative) towards the learning of the English language in primary
school, their attitudes changed over time as a result of the experiences that they came across during their academic literacy development. Eventually, they found themselves with common negative perceptions of academic literacy in English. This showed that attitudes towards learning in languages such as English were quite dynamic and could actually be determined by the amount of exposure that students got in learning certain linguistic elements or academic literacy skills at any particular level of study. Students needed to be provided with a firm foundation of the necessary linguistic elements and instructional methods which they needed to possess at any given level of their academic literacy development, if they were to perform effectively in the use of EAP. There was also need for institutes of higher learning in the Netherlands, such as the University of Groningen, not to underestimate the need for developing academic literacy learning strategies in students as these enhanced their efficacy in using EAP.

Salomon, Shona, Mary and Jane actually realised new kinds of linguistic and academic literacy needs during the course of their academic literacy development. When the four students reached university level, they had no expectations of receiving instruction in English as their major aim was to specialise in minority languages other than English. However, they came across EAP when they enrolled for a Dutch/English taught minor course in Applied Linguistics. It was at this point that all of them actually realised the need to know academic literacy skills in English.

All the four students mentioned that receiving instruction in multiple languages at university level was quite confusing as this resulted in languages interfering with each other during the learning process. This finding contradicted with Cummings (1994) who
was of the idea that one’s native language being used at academic level actually facilitated easy mastering of the use of EAP. Cummings (1994) viewed interference as facilitating a smooth transition from a minority based instructional curricula to one that was more centred on the use of EAP.

The major problem at hand was that students were not provided with the necessary academic literacy skills in English which was why languages tended to mix up whenever they tried to use reading strategies such as L2-L1 word translations when reading academic texts written in English. Students who were not exposed to reading academic texts written in English found themselves reading a book and articles from Applied Linguistics which likely consisted of complex structures and discipline specific words that at times were beyond the students’ recognition. The same problem was also evident in writing as students were not aware of the writing conventions required for use by the Applied Linguistics domain. One student, Mary, actually confessed that she resorted to using French words whenever she found trouble locating English words during the writing process. This highlighted the strategy that she used in order to cope with academic writing in English. Other students such as Shona, actually took it upon themselves to cater for their own academic literacy needs by consulting the internet for guidelines on how to use EAP. In this regard, courses such as the minor course in Applied Linguistics can actually be used to develop students’ learning strategies as a complement to instruction from internet sources which is rarely not that much interactive and active.

4.6 Conclusion, limitations and recommendations
A quantitative analysis revealed that BA undergraduate students who were enrolled for the minor course in Applied Linguistics had varying perceptions towards academic literacy in English. A qualitative analysis on the other hand, revealed that the language and academic literacy needs of students who had negative perceptions towards the use of EAP changed over time depending on context and level of study. At primary school, students had the need for word production. In high school, focus was more on learning about grammar and the rules of the English language (as Salomon mentioned in her confirmation interview Appendix 4). At university level, it was observed that undergraduate students were not explicitly taught the necessary academic literacy skills which they needed to possess for them to be efficient readers in English. Consequently, the students who were used to receiving instruction in languages other than English at tertiary level resorted to various reading and writing strategies such as using the dictionary and consulting the internet among others, in order to overcome the challenges they faced with using EAP for the minor course in Applied Linguistics.

The challenges faced in this study were that the researcher failed to carry out confirmation interviews with all the participants who’s LLhs had been analyzed as the students failed to respond to the researcher’s interview requests communicated through announcements on Nestor. It was recommended that minor courses such as those from Applied Linguistics should be a platform for teaching English academic literacy skills to first year students on inception, especially those who were used to receiving instruction in languages other than English. It was observed that the explicit provision of academic literacy skills in English such as (the use of linguistic cues during reading, English academic writing conventions, scanning, skimming, etcetera) to undergraduate students
was taken for granted in the Netherlands. The fact that students were not provided with comprehensible reading material and instruction pertaining to the use of cognitive and metacognitive skills when using EAP was a cause for concern as second year students at university level still faced problems with academic literacy in English.

Consequently, diagnostic reading tests which focus on academic literacy skills could be developed in order to test students’ abilities to use cognitive and metacognitive skills. Results from such tests could inspire EAP curricula development whose objectives would be centred on addressing learner academic literacy needs. From the results of this study, it was gathered that since academic literacy skills in English were regarded as skilled behaviour, the undergraduate students who were enrolled for the Dutch/English taught minor course needed to be made aware of the necessary cognitive and metacognitive skills required when using EAP. Academic literacy skills in English needed to be learned and improved through practice as some cognitive skills (such as scanning) may not be instinctual.

In studying the bilingually taught minor subject, prospective BA students should be motivated by the desire to understand the reading material in English, so comprehension, as one of the facets of reading, should be considered of major importance. Students reading skills in English at academic level need to be enhanced. As their reading skills progress it makes an impact on their knowledge of language. L2 reading thus extends for the learner the boundaries and realms of understanding thereby facilitating effective writing in English as well.
REFERENCES


Appendix 1: Questionnaire

BA STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC LITERACY IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

Instructions: Please give brief responses to all the following questions in your respective journals.

General Questions
a) -How old are you?
b) -Gender: please state whether male or female
c) -What is your nationality?
d) -Are you a native speaker of the English language?  State whether YES or NO
e) -If not what is your native language?
f) -In your native country, is English the major language of instruction used in high schools and Universities?
g) -When did you start learning through the English medium?
h) -What type of English language proficiency test did you take prior beginning your studies at University of Groningen? Was it TOEFL or Schriftelijk eindexamen VWO? please specify

Specific questions relating to your perceptions on academic reading

1a) Do you enjoy reading academic texts written in English?

Not at all □  not really □  so-so □  quite a lot □  very much □

1b) Give reason for the choice you made.................................................................

2) What kind of texts do you read in your minor course from Applied Linguistics?........

3) How do you look for information when reading academic texts written in English?................................................................................................................................

4) Do you use the same methods of reading when you read academic texts written in ESL as compared to entertainment magazines?

Yes □  No □

5) In your major programme of study do you only read texts written in English or texts written in languages other than English?

Read texts in English and other languages □  Read texts in other languages only □
6) Are you more comfortable with reading books written in your native language as compared to English?

   Not at all □ not really □ so-so □ quite a lot □ very much □

7a) What kind of problems do you face when reading academic texts in English?

   Word recognition  Yes □ No □

   Reading complex sentences  Yes □ No □

7b) Please explain the problem/s you chose above in 7a……………………………......

8) How do you handle the problems you come across when reading academic texts written in English?.................................................................

Specific questions relating to your perceptions on academic writing

9a) Considering your language background what do you think of academic writing in ESL? Please choose one of the responses below and justify your answer

   Not at all □ not really □ so-so □ quite a lot □ very much □

9b) Give reason for your answer…………………………………………………………

10) To whom do you write your assignments?....................................................

11) What issues do you take into account while writing your assignments?..............

12) Do you consider yourself as a member of the academic community whenever you write in ESL?

   Not at all □ not really □ so-so □ quite a lot □ very much □

13) Do you consider yourself as contributing any new information to your area of study whenever you engage in assignment writing?

   Not at all □ not really □ so-so □ quite a lot □ very much □
Appendix 2

Consent Form

Date……………………..

I………………………………. student number………………………have agreed to let Mr Otto Mponda whose student number is s1941178@student.rug.nl to anonymously use my Language Learning History as data for his Masters thesis on Undergraduate students’ perceptions of academic literacy in English as a second language.

Signature of the student                         Signature of the researcher

……………………..                         …………………………..

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Appendix 3a: Copy of Shona’s LLH showing the coding process

Language Learning History
By Karin Mantilla

When I was only seven years old I started my lessons in English. I was still in Primary School. The lessons consisted of learning simple words like “color”, members of the family and so on. I had only one lesson a week during whole Primary School. Finishing Primary School I had a very basic level of English. My native language is Spanish and the importance of English wasn’t very high.

In Highschool I continued my English lessons. I now had two hours a week English lessons. The level of education was a bit higher now. By means of a book we learned to describe normal daily situations. We also learned to sing simple songs. I continued my lessons during five years.

After finishing Highschool I enrolled in an English course in the centre of languages in University. This was an intensive course of about five hours a week which I took for about two years. The material we used was from the University of Cambridge, England. Now I finally learned more about English grammar and I extended my vocabulary. There was a special book for exercises about grammar. I concluded the course with a certificate.

Although during Primary School and Highschool I acquired very little knowledge of English I did not experience this as a deficiency. In my native country, Peru, Spanish is the main language and therefore one does not experience problems when not speaking English. On the other hand, the two years course I took, stimulated me in learning another language, namely French.

I came to the Netherlands in 2004 and after a few years I started my studies of Roman Languages and Cultures in Groningen. In this studies my home language is Spanish and therefore I do not have much need for English. I know that the level of English in Highschool in the Netherlands is quite high. So I expect the level of English education in University will be high as well. In my studies until now I have encountered so far a few English theory books. One was about phonology and the other about the development of theatre from the ancient Greeks until modern times. In this course which I am taking now, I also have to use English at a high level.

Since I am studying Roman Languages and Cultures I would like to be able to have all the classes in Spanish. Now it is a mixture of Dutch, Spanish and English. In some courses one needs a good level of English. Sometimes textbooks are in English, which you have to understand in order to pass the exams. If I were to study English at the University I would very much like to have all the classes in English. This would be the perfect environment to develop my English and take it to a higher level. It would also be recommendable to have some native speaking professors.

I think that the way of studying English here is a very active way. This means that one has to take an active part in learning by entering in conversations, reading books, interact with the lecturer in English. It is a more practical way of learning.

Although I did an intensive course in English, it was a long time ago. I now experience a little difficulty in using English. This concerns as well listening as reading and writing. I use a sound recorder to grab the lecture for further use later on. With the use of dictionaries and the
reading and writing. I use a sound recorder to grab the lecture for further use later on. With the use of dictionaries and the Internet I fairly manage writing and reading. So I am learning and improving my English doing this course.

I still have a lot to improve. I try to improve my listening skills by watching English television which is far more easy here than it was in Peru. Here one sees and hears a lot of English, while in Peru everything is in Spanish, even American programs. I also have to enlarge my vocabulary in order to be able to better understand reading and to better writing. Finally I would also like to improve my pronunciation which is very "South American".

English is not my main subject. After graduation I would like to take time to further improve my English, first by taking a new English course in order to regain my knowledge in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Later on I would like to have the opportunity of practising English in a native speaking environment. Although this will be hard to make come true.

I would like to advice future students to prepare themselves by taking language courses in for example Great Britain. Experiencing the language in a native environment prior to entering Higher Education will bring more success to finishing a study in English.
Appendix 4: Salomon’s confirmation interview. AUDIO CD ATTACHMENT