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## Book Review

# English for Academic Purposes in Neoliberal Universities: A Critical Grounded Theory

Hadley, Gregory. Switzerland: Springer International, 2014. (184 Pages). ISBN 978-3-319-10448-5.

Reviewed by Gemma Campion  
*Nottingham Trent University*

First and foremost, *English for Academic Purposes in Neoliberal Universities* which is the result of over seven years of research and interviews with over ninety participants at eighteen higher education institutions in Japan, the UK and the USA, and seeks to critically highlight the processes and strategies used by English for Academic Purposes (EAP) middle managers, so called Blended EAP Professionals (BLEAPs), to negotiate and survive the neoliberal university. However, in its unique exploration of the effects of neoliberalisation *in the EAP context*, its implications extend well beyond the professional lives of BLEAPs, to not only teachers of EAP (TEAPs) and others who work in the field, but also to all of those working within the increasingly commodified context of higher educational institutions (HEIs).

The book is written by Gregory Hadley, who has lived and worked predominantly in Japan for over twenty years, and who has published articles widely on English language teaching (ELT), as well as on a range of research interests including historical literature and oral history. Although the emergence of the neoliberal university has been the subject of increasing interest in the literature over recent years, as Hadley points out, “scant attention has been given

to the effects of neoliberalism on tertiary level EAP” (p. 4) until now. Hadley’s discussion of the data is interspersed with frequent, often quite lengthy extracts from the interviews, which give the reader direct insights into the ways in which these BLEAPs attempt to understand, and survive in, the modern-day “corporate” university. BLEAPs are defined as “a new and highly disposable type of HEI worker who is neither fully academic nor fully administrative in nature” (p. 8).

Beyond its focus on BLEAPs, the book also turns a light on the wider, more pervasive process of “professional disarticulation”. This process, which forms a core category of Hadley’s theory, is defined as the increasing sense of dislocation that people feel from their professional identities as the result of organisational dynamics which have blurred traditional boundaries and created instability. Although it is framed in relation to BLEAPs in the context of this study, it has resonance for TEAPs and all who are working within a culture where education has been reduced to “replicable products [which require] constant surveillance and control” (p. 40).

The book begins with a short first person narrative in which Hadley is sat on a plane on a university business trip, where he began reflecting on changes in higher education in Japan and wondering about what effect these changes were having on those who work within the field. He paints a rather bleak picture of the privatisation of university education and teachers’ mounting workloads and dwindling autonomy, which he sets against the pampered back-drop of the presidential plane and chauffeur driven cars of his business trip. From this initial scene-setting, the book’s organization follows standard research reporting, containing chapters on the study’s concepts, methodology, context and results.

Hadley’s research does not aim to be a contrastive study of neoliberalisation in different countries, and although his discussion largely generalises about its effects, he does also highlight differences where they occur. As such, Japan receives numerous specific mentions throughout the book, and although the discussion is often brief, what emerges is a picture of Japan as being somewhat a step behind other countries, in its journey towards neoliberalisation. When talking about ideology, for example, Hadley notes that Japan has started

to “mirror changes first seen in the United States” (p. 28) relating to the abandonment of cultural ideals in favour of vocational training. The book’s relevance for those in Japan is perhaps therefore less in its ability to reflect current conditions and more in its ability to forewarn of changes to come. Whilst, for example, the study reveals that the internal weighing and measuring of TEAPs is particularly demanding in the UK context, in Japan, at least for now, it remains something of a formality. One wonders, however, how long this will continue to be the case, given the wide-scale privatisation of universities in Japan and the concurrent establishment of a neoliberal model of governance.

The approach taken in the study is “critical grounded theory”, which Hadley takes considerable time to explain, and which is worthwhile, given that as a research methodology it has rarely been used in the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics. Whilst Grounded Theory (GT) carries some of the typical weaknesses of qualitative methodology, such as concerns about researcher bias, it claims to be more systematic and generalisable in so far as the theorist is involved in a long process of coding data before looking for commonalities. These are then examined further, with the ultimate goal being to “identify actions and social processes which are transferrable across similar social environments” (p. 14). The critical element that is included is necessary because of Hadley’s particular concern for examining a social process which is deeply bound up with power, stratification, economic domination, and exploitation.

Following an in-depth elucidation of the methodology, the following chapter attempts to counter a criticism often leveled at grounded theorists (which is that they fail to adequately explain the concepts which inform their theories) by discussing issues which shape EAP in the Third Space of Neoliberal Universities. In a similar vein, the following chapter provides a detailed introduction to the concept of BLEAPs, before going on to discuss the strategies that they use to survive, under the rather imaginatively named categories of hunting and gathering, weighing and measuring, and moulding and shaping. The final chapter provides some very brief reflections on the study and mention of implications.

Whilst this book will undoubtedly be of most interest to so-called BLEAPs,

being one of the first to look at the effects of neoliberalisation in the EAP context means that this book makes a substantial and unique contribution to helping all of us who work in the field become more aware of the nature of the forces which are currently shaping our professional lives and impacting upon our behaviours and identities. TEAPs do however only receive explicit mention in passing, and whilst there is little that is *directly* useful to this audience, there is much to be gleaned from the way in which Hadley reveals the reality of professional life within the EAP unit and the way in which the business model can shape our working lives. The book is also notable for its choice of methodology; GT has barely been used in TESOL research, but its use here may spark more interest across the field. Whilst GT represents a qualitative methodology, it claims the advantage of a more systematised analysis of data, which aims to make connections with situations beyond the confines of the present research context. In this way, the findings also have potential and far-reaching relevance, not only for departments across the higher education sector but also for other institutions such as hospitals and care homes, which are currently undergoing a similar process of change.

Perhaps due to the nature of the methodology employed, the results for the most part present long and detailed schemes of strategies which BLEAPs are found to use. In terms of hunting and gathering, for example, BLEAPs are found to use a range of strategies which involve a number of activities from securing resource flows, investment servicing, milking the cash cow, and resource leeching. At times, the descriptive detail is lengthy, and as a (TEAP) reader I did find myself wanting to skip over parts of these chapters in order to get to the summaries, which give a more succinct account of BLEAP behaviour. However, there are interesting insights into the ways in which these strategies often implicate, and impact upon teachers. The section on resource prospecting, for example, reveals that Caucasian, native speaker TEAPs are often seen as highly valuable in Japanese HEIs. The “younger, more energetic, ...smiling foreign instructor”, who often feature prominently in universities’ recruitment literature, can act as an important tool in the hunting and gathering of domestic students.

Although the methodology used in this study is focused upon actions and

social processes, I felt that the discussion would have been greatly complemented (both in terms of providing a richer understanding, and in terms of simply being a more interesting read) by more information relating to identity, and insights into how the subjects *feel* about their role and the vast changes which are sweeping through their work environments. Chapter seven, concerning the implications of the study is also very brief, with little by way of concrete suggestions for action.

The important contribution of this study is not so much in its results per se, but rather in its overall ability to uncover the power of neoliberalisation and the manner and extent to which it is shaping the behaviour of people who work in EAP, the wider implications it has for students, and for the very nature of education and how we conceive of it. Whilst the data is interesting and offers insights into the ways in which BLEAPs are adapting their behaviour in order to survive in their very precarious space between that of managers and teachers, where the book really holds interest is in its wider discussion of organisational and ideological change. The chapter on “EAP in the Third Space of Neoliberal Universities” is particularly key; it provides much food for thought in its discussion of the globalisation, massification, and even McDonaldisation of higher education, raising issues that are not yet, in EAP, receiving the (urgent) attention that they surely warrant. If nothing else, Hadley’s book should be read for its capacity to warn us of the danger of falling into a corporate-culture-induced slumber, and hopefully prevent us from sleepwalking our way into becoming little more than “pedagogic factory workers” (p. 155) in the academic sweatshops of the future.

## Author Bio

*Gemma Campion was teaching in-sessional English for Academic Purposes at Nottingham Trent University at the time of writing. Prior to that she worked on pre-sessional programmes, as well as in ESOL and EFL. She is particularly interested in teachers, and investigated the process of learning to teach EAP for her masters dissertation in TESOL. gemmacampion@hotmail.com*

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