APPENDIX D

REVIEW OF PORTUGUESE ACADEMIC STYLE MANUALS
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Introduction

In Portugal, unlike the UK and US, there is not a strong teaching tradition with regards to academic discourse. Indeed, academic writing is not always clearly distinguishable from literary writing in some subjects (see Appendices A and C), and it is perhaps this blurring of boundaries that has led to the notion, frequently expressed by both lecturers and students in the Humanities, that one cannot teach writing, that it is a highly personal activity deeply bound up with one's identity and private experience and therefore not susceptible to standardization. This may be why, when I made informal inquiries in Coimbra bookshops about books on Portuguese academic writing style in 1997, I found only one work easily available, a Portuguese translation of Umberto Eco's Como se faz uma tese em ciências humanas, first published in Italian twenty years earlier.

This situation may now be changing, however. The increased centralisation of research funding at European level has led to the imposition of the Anglo-Saxon model upon many aspects of the Portuguese academic system, and this seems to have had repercussions upon attitudes to discourse. Now there are books available about academic writing in Portugal, and courses have started to appear in universities designed to teach it.

This study, then, aims to compare the situation in Portugal with that in the UK (Appendix B), looking not only at the quantity and nature of the manuals available, but also at the kind of advice given in them. Correlations have also been sought between the prescriptions made in these books as regards what constitutes good academic writing in Portuguese with the actual practice of Portuguese scholars identified in Appendix A. As we shall see, the situation is quite complex.
**Method**

This study was carried out in June/July 2008 in Coimbra, the city in Portugal most dominated by its university and where the ratio of students to townsfolk is reputedly higher than in any other. As might be expected, the city has a large number of bookshops for its size, with stock lists heavily oriented towards student reading lists. This, then, would seem to be the ideal place to find a representative sample of the academic style manuals available on the market.

The main bookshops in Coimbra are *Bertrand, Almedina, Minerva, FNAC* and *Quarteto*, and these were all visited with a view to creating a bibliography of academic discourse manuals available. The bookshops were also asked to do a computer search of other relevant titles on their lists in addition to the ones currently stocked.

The books that were in stock were then examined in order to glean an idea of their contents, with special attention given to the question of writing style. The results are as follows.

**Results**

Overall, a total of 17 relevant titles were stocked by the Coimbra bookshops, with another 3 found listed in the catalogues (see Bibliography). However, it must be pointed out that it was not easy to find the books in question. In most cases, the academic writing manuals were mixed up with grammars and *'prontuários'*\(^1\), Secondary School textbooks and ‘crammers’, or works on Rhetoric, or in some cases were distributed according to focus around different sections (Social Sciences, Health Sciences, etc).

There were also only a few available per shop, as Table 1 below shows.

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\(^1\) These are popular little handbooks which give typically advice about Portuguese spelling and usage, focusing upon items that are commonly confused.
Table I) No. of titles available per store.

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Computer searches were also limited by the fact that most of the bookshops did not organize their stock lists by subject. Moreover, 'academic discourse' is a difficult concept to translate into Portuguese, as we have already seen. Indeed, of all the works listed in the Bibliography, only one (Perrotta, 2004) uses the term 'académico' in its title; five refer to 'trabalhos/livros científicos' (Ceia, 1995; D’Oliveira, 2007; Madeira et al, 2004; Pereira et al, 2006; Serrano, 1996), while all the others identify themselves by the specific genre involved (tese, dissertação, monografia, relatório, trabalho escolar, projecto de investigação, ensaio, trabalho de conclusão de curso, etc).

Another interesting point is that most of the books on the list were not originally produced in Portugal. 7 are Brazilian (Alves, 2003; Brevidelli et al, 2006; Hübner, 1998; Martins et al, 2000; Martins Júnior, 2008; Salomé, 2004 and Vieira, 2001); 3 have been translated from English (Bell, 1993; Clanchy, 1998, and Sussams, 1983) and 1 from Italian (Eco, 1997).

As regards content, what was most immediately obvious was the scantiness of advice given about writing style. The majority of books consulted did not even mention the issue, but instead devoted most of their attention to matters such as textual macrostructure, bibliography, research techniques, general study skills, etc. Those that did touch on the subject generally did so very briefly, such as this contribution from Ceia (1995:19):

*Não há modelos de estilo ou da escrita que possam ser «copiadas» ou «adaptadas» por um investigador. Cada indivíduo deve procurar um*
We should note here, however, that, despite the assertion that style is ultimately a personal matter that cannot really be taught, the author nevertheless emphasises the need to be objective and intelligible and to support one's claims with evidence, thereby moving a considerable way towards the English model. Elsewhere, he asserts that written style should not be too learned and opaque (‘muito erudito e hermético’), but neither should it become too demotic or standardized:

*Pelo contrário, o excessivo vulgarização e padronização do discurso pode levar a um texto impessoal, amorfo, incaracterístico e inaceitável no quadro das exigências d uma tese de pós-graduação...*  
[“On the contrary, an excessively standardized or common discourse may result in a text that is impersonal, amorphous, uncharacteristic and unacceptable within the framework of a postgraduate thesis.”]

This would seem to be an attempt to find a compromise between the plain style generally favoured in EAD (see Appendix B: 20-22) and the high-flown rhetoric that traditionally characterises Portuguese discourse in the humanities (see Appendix A: 51-53; Appendix C: 7-8; 16-18).

The most popular book, stocked by almost all the Coimbra bookshops (Azevedo, 2006) also devotes no more than four pages (47-50) to questions of written style, and offers only very general advice. Once more, the basic precepts are in keeping with the English style manuals: eg. “Procure exprimir o seu pensamento com clareza e habitue-se a procurar a palavra que traduz o seu pensamento com mais propriedade” [“Try to express your thoughts clearly and look for the word that best translates your idea”]; "A preocupação de clareza é mais premente se usa períodos longos com várias
proposições. Os períodos curtos são mais fáceis de ler e de redigir” [“The concern with clarity becomes more pressing if you use long periods with various propositions. Short periods are easier to read and construct”]; “Esforce-se especialmente por evitar períodos confusos, incompletos ou sintacticamente incorrectos” [“Make a special effort to avoid periods that are confused, incomplete or grammatically incorrect”].

However, it is clear from the formulations used that the readership addressed here is accustomed to a different approach to writing. The benefits of the plain style are not assumed to be self-evident, and the possibility of creating long syntactically-complex sentences is not excluded out of hand. Moreover, the terminology (‘periods’, ‘propositions’) is lifted from the rhetorical tradition, and thus contrasts markedly with the grammatical terminology (‘sentences’, ‘clauses’, etc) usually found in English (UK) style manuals.

Another author (Serrano, 1996) goes to considerable lengths to contextualise the demands of academic discourse within a rhetorical framework. Having asserted that all academic writing should be governed by simplicity, clarity, precision and brevity (‘simplicidade’, ‘clareza’, ‘precisão’, ‘brevidade’), he goes on to situate this within the three classical levels of style:

O estilo sublime, muito próprio da narrativa poética, é aquele em que “se despregam todas as pompas da eloquência, agitando violentemente as paixões, por meio de uma expressão rica e animada”. Este estilo, que tem por objectivo arrebatar assembleias, caracteriza-se pela energia, veemência e magnificência do discurso/.../ Há que considerar dois outros géneros estilísticos: o estilo médio, caracterizado pela finura, riqueza e delicadeza do discurso, e o estilo simples, caracterizado por um discurso claro, conciso e natural, isto é, um discurso que dispensa os artifícios de linguagem, se cinge somente às ideias que tem em vista expor e que apresenta as palavras sem afectação, evitando os termos ambíguos e as construções difíceis.

Tendo em vista a finalidade da comunicação em ciência (transmitir tão clara e sucintamente quanto necessário os resultados de uma pesquisa, o estilo simples é aquele que melhor serve a linguagem científica. (p.55)
[The high or grand style, which is appropriate for poetic narrative, is the one that “unleashes eloquence in all its pomp, violently stirring up the passions with rich animated forms of expression”. This style, which aims primarily to stir up an audience, is characterized by energy, vehemence and magnificence of discourse /.../ There are also two other styles to be considered: the middle style, which is refined, rich and delicate, and the plain style, characterised by a clear, concise, natural discourse, i.e. a discourse that dispenses with linguistic artifice and is concerned only with transmitting the ideas, using words unaffectedly and avoiding ambiguous terms and difficult constructions.

Given the aims of scientific communication (to transmit the results of research as clearly and succinctly as possible), it is the plain style that best serves the needs of scientific language.]

This is followed by a ‘translation’ of a passage by Camões into the plain style (Serrano comments ironically: 'The Lusiads can be effectively dispatched in one or two lines’), and an anecdote about a French medical journal that commissioned English writing specialists to diagnose why medical articles produced in France did not get published in international journals; the conclusion was that the written style was wrong ("pecavam no seu estilo caseiro"), for instead of being fully explicit and using short sentences with one idea per period, the French style was elliptical, imprecise and full of redundancies (Idem: 56).

The point of this digression appears to be that the Portuguese are liable to make the same mistakes. Serrano points out that France strongly influenced Portuguese culture until the second half of the 20th century (Idem), and so it is understandable that the traditional Portuguese style should include features borrowed from the French. This is why, he reiterates, the Portuguese need to learn simplicity, clarity, precision and brevity in their writing.

Similar qualities are highlighted by Estrela et al. (2006: 47), though using slightly different terminology:
A qualidade linguística de uma comunicação científica é fundamentalmente assegurada pelas seguintes características:

- **Clareza**: precisão, ordem, propriedade.
- **Correção**: rigor.
- **Puraça**: vernacularidade.

[The linguistic quality of an academic paper is assured by the following characteristics:

- **Clarity**: precision, order, appropriateness.
- **Accuracy**: rigour.
- **Purity**: the use of the vernacular.]

This is further elaborated on pages 47-50 with a list of Dos and Don’ts that include:

- ‘the use of short periods, trying to be simple and direct’ (*períodos curtos, procurando ser simples e directo*);
- moderation in the use of subordinate clauses (*moderação no uso de /.../ orações subordinadas*);
- paragraphs of no more than three or four periods (*os parágrafos devem ter no máximo três ou quatro períodos, de modo a que haja pausas que proporcionem ao leitor tempo para acompanhar o raciocínio e absorver a informação*);
- close attention to cohesion (*estrita coerência referencial*);
- explicitness of meaning (*explicitação total do sentido*) and careful choice of words (*rigor semântico*).

The authors go on to affirm that discourse used should not be erudite and opaque, impeding intelligibility through the excessive use of archaisms, neologisms, high-flown terms or foreign loan words [*o autor de um trabalho científico não deve utilizar um discurso erudito e hermético, comprometendo a inteligibilidade do texto pelo uso excessivo de arcaismos /.../, neologismos /.../, eruditismos /.../ e barbarismos ou estrangeirismos*]; but, neither should it be excessively colloquial through the use of

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2 This particular choice of terms may reflect an orientation towards the Rhetorical tradition. Classical *'elocutio'* required four basic qualities, which are often translated as ‘purity’ (the use of current language); clarity; appropriacy and ornament. Although the last of the qualities has been omitted from the list, presumably in deference to the Plain Style, it should be pointed out that in another more general style manual, the authors provide an extensive list of the classical figures of speech (Estrela et al. 2003: 180-184).
dialect terms or slang ['não deve empregar um vocabulário vulgar ou recorrer a provincianismos/.../ e a plebeísmos...'].

However, despite the general similarity to the advice given in English style manuals, these authors also recommend the use of certain features (Idem: 43-47) that are alien to EAD, and which have been considered Distinguishing Discourse Markers in Appendix A (17-35). These are:

i. The use of the 1st person plural ('nós'), on the grounds that this creates the effect of collective thought, thus softening the effect of over-assertiveness that could result from personal claims ("...cria-se o efeito de expressão de um pensamento coletivo, suavizando o modo impositivo das afirmações.");

ii. The use of the reflexive ('forma impessoal');

iii. The use of discursive formulae ('formulas discursivas') such as typical introductory verbs (many of which constitute the Interpersonal Framing Devices, described in Appendix A: 22-24);

iv. The use of Historical Tenses, such as the Present, Future and Conditional to refer to events that have happened in the past.

This, to my mind, illustrates the persistence of certain traditional Portuguese features in an academic discourse that is clearly trying to ‘modernise’ in line with international expectations. Indeed, these prescriptions are interesting in that they legitimise some of the more common practices found in the Corpus.

As for the work by Umberto Eco (1997), arguably the first to be widely divulged on the Portuguese market and possibly the most influential, having now been through 13 editions, this contains a short section (162-169) entitled ‘Como se fala’ ['How you should speak']. Once again, the advice offered is very general in nature and
basically in line with that given by Ceia (1995) and Estrela et al. (2006) as regards register. On the one hand he insists that the academic writer should not imitate Proust:

Nada de períodos longos. Se vos acontecer fazê-los, dividam-nos depois. Não receiem repetir duas vezes o sujeito. Eliminam o excesso de pronomes e de orações subordinadas. (162)

[There should be no long periods. If they do occur, then split them up afterwards. Don't be afraid to repeat the subject twice. Remove any excessive pronouns and subordinate clauses.]

But neither should one try to be e.e.cummings:

Esta recomendação é importante porque muitos tendem hoje a fazer teses «de rupture» em que não são respeitadas as regras do discurso crítico. Mas a linguagem da tese é uma metalinguagem, ou seja, uma linguagem que fala de outras linguagens. (164)

[This advice is important because there are many people today trying to do 'alternative' dissertations that do not respect the rules of critical discourse. But the language of the thesis is a metalanguage, that is, a language used to talk about other languages.]

Elsewhere in this section, Eco makes a number of recommendations that are basically in line with EAD, such as the use of frequent paragraph breaks (‘façam parágrafo com frequência’, 164), the avoidance of colloquial punctuation devices such as omission points (‘reticências’) and exclamation marks (165) and the definition of key words the first time they appear (167). However, he overtly allows the possibility of figurative writing (we must remember that he is writing specifically for students of the 'human sciences'):

Um ensaio crítico ou um texto científico deveriam ser escritos em linguagem referencial (com todos os termos bem definidos e unívocos), mas também pode ser útil utilizar uma metáfora, uma ironia ou uma litotes /.../. Ora, as figuras de retórica ou se usam ou não se usam. Se se usam é porque se presume que o nosso leitor está em condições de as aprender e porque se considera que desse modo o argumento toma uma forma mais incisiva e convincente. Então /.../ não é necessário explicá-las. (165-6)

[A critical essay or academic text should be written in referential language (with all terms clearly defined and unambiguous), but it can also make use of the odd metaphor, irony or litotes /.../. However, rhetorical figures are either used or they are not. If we decide to use them, it is because we consider our reader to be in a position to understand them, and because we}
believe that they will make our argument more compelling. It is, therefore
not necessary to explain them.

Finally, like Estrela et al. (2006), quoted above, he specifically recommends the
use of the first person plural form to avoid excessive personalization, though
acknowledging the existence of some debate on this issue:

_Eu ou nós? Na tese devem introduzir-se as opiniões próprias na primeira
pessoa? /.../ Alguns pensam que é mais honesto fazer assim do que utilizar
o plural majestático. Eu não diria isso. Diz-se «nós» porque se presume
que o que se afirma possa ser partilhado pelos leitores._ (168)

[Should we use "I" or "we"? Should our own opinions be introduced using
the first person in a thesis? /.../ Some think that it is more honest to do that
than to use the _magisterial plural_. But I don’t think so. The form “we” is
used because we presume that what we are saying is shared by our
readers.]

As regards the other academic writing manuals found in the Coimbra
bookstores, few offered any advice at all as regards writing style. Pereira & Poupa
(2006) have a chapter on the topic (24-34), but it is more concerned with concrete
aspects such as the presentation of quotations and bibliographic references. They do,
however, insist that key terms should be properly defined the first time they appear, and
recommend the use of an impersonal style, something they claim, like Estrela et al. and
Eco (who, incidently, is expressly quoted by them) is best achieved by the use of the 1st
person plural.

Hence, it would seem that the advice offered by academic style manuals
currently on the market in Portugal is to some extent in keeping with the precepts
governing EAD (particularly the need for clarity, precision and brevity, the avoidance
of an over-inflated register, the preference for short sentences and frequent
paragraphing, etc). However, there is also evidence that the Anglo-Saxon model is
being adapted to Romance-language traditions. The most obvious differences are in the
use of the 1st person plural and historic present tense, which are not acceptable in
English; but we should also note the greater tolerance for elaborate syntactic constructions and figurative language.

**Conclusion**

The increase of books on the Portuguese market designed to teach students how to prepare theses, dissertations, reports, assignments, etc, would suggest that the Anglo-Saxon model of academic discourse has begun to impinge. However, it is less clear whether attitudes have really changed as regards the 'teachability' of style. As we have seen, only 6 of the books even broach the subject, and most of those limit themselves to rather broad generalizations about the need for clarity and precision, without going into much detail about how that should be achieved.

Of the few works that offer more concrete advice, what is most noticeable is the way in which the suggestions are inserted into a rhetorical framework, either explicitly, as in the case of Serrano (1996), or implicitly (as in Azevedo, 2006; Estrela et al. 2006; Eco, 1997) through the references to ‘periods’, ‘propositions’, ‘figures of speech’, etc. Not only does this distinguish them from works published in the UK, which do not usually expect their readership to be familiar with the rhetorical tradition, but it also confers some legitimacy upon features of style commonly found in Portuguese academic writing and which are generally considered to be unacceptable in English (see Appendices A and C).

It is also evident from the tone adopted by some of these authors that many of their prescriptions will be unfamiliar, and perhaps unpalatable, to the target readership. Despite the fact that the arguments mobilised in defence of the Plain Style are not unlike those used by Bacon, Locke, Hobbes, etc, at the dawn of the Scientific Era in

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3 The situation is possibly somewhat different in the US, where rhetorical terminology has persisted and/or made a comeback.
England (see Chapter 5), the authors of these Portuguese style books sometimes seem to lack conviction in the inherent ‘rightness’ of this style. Witness, for example, Serrano’s ironic rendering of a passage of Camões into the Plain Style (1996:55); his anecdote about the French doctors (idem); Azevedo’s rather non-committal attitude to the virtues of the short direct sentence in comments such as “A preocupação de clareza é mais premente se usa períodos longos com várias proposições” (2006:48) [“The concern with clarity becomes more pressing if you use long periods with various propositions”]; and Estrela et al.’s endorsement of particular Portuguese style features.

The overwhelming impression, then, is of an academy that is under pressure to change its traditional habits in order to become more acceptable to the outside world. These authors are trying to inculcate the hegemonic values into their students, while at the same time retaining a degree of distance on the issue, attempting wherever possible to reconcile aspects of the traditional discourse with the requirements of international style.
Bibliography: *Portuguese Academic Style Manuals on the Market* (Sept. 2008)

(Titles listed in bold were physically consulted in Coimbra bookshops. All other titles were from the online catalogues provided by those same bookshops)


Perrotta, Cláudia. 2004. Um texto para chamar de seu – preliminares sobre a produção do texto acadêmico (Martins Fontes)


Vieira, Sónia. 2001. Como Escrever uma Tese (Editora Pioneira)