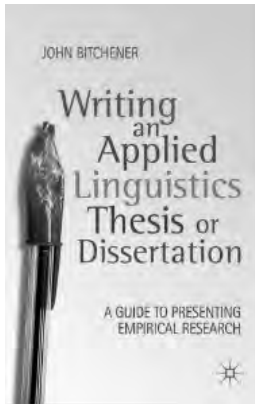


September 2010 – Volume 14, Number 2

Applied Linguistics Thesis or Dissertation: A Guide to Presenting Empirical Research		
Author:	John Bitchener (2010)	
Publisher:	London: Palgrave	
Pages	ISBN	Price
pp. 216+xi	978-0-230-22454-4	\$26.95 U.S.



In *Writing an Applied Linguistics Thesis or Dissertation: A Guide to Presenting Empirical Research*, Bitchener, adopting an ESP approach, investigates the process of writing the genre of thesis providing practical suggestions for Applied Linguistics graduate students. As dissertation writing can be considered as one of the relatively under-researched areas in second language writing, this step-by-step guide can be very useful for graduate students not only in Applied Linguistics but also in other disciplines.

Chapter 1, “Background”, introduces the goals of the book and its intended audience. In this guide-book, Bitchener provides first time thesis writers with guidance on how to present their research. In this respect, the target audience of this book is primarily Masters and Honors students who want to write a thesis, but those doctoral students who have not completed a thesis requirement before can also benefit from this guide. An overview of the content of the book is provided for those readers who might wish to have a quick summary of the contents. Each chapter of the book is titled according to one part-genre of the genre of thesis, such as abstract, introduction, and conclusion. The structure, content and requirements of these part genres are explained with the help of a sample thesis entitled “Willingness to communicate in a second language classroom” by Katherine Cao, who won the Applied Linguistics Association of New Zealand Best Master’s thesis award.

The remaining chapters, namely, Chapter 2, “Abstract”, Chapter 3, “Introduction”, Chapter 4, “Literature review”, Chapter 5, “Methodology”, Chapter 6, “Results”, Chapter 7 “Discussion and results,” and Chapter 8, “Conclusion” all have the same format. They all started with a short introduction to the part-genre that is explored throughout the chapter. For instance, in this introductory chapter in Chapter 2, the thesis abstract is explained briefly. Later, the functions are analyzed. In the functions section of Chapter 3, the functions of a thesis introduction are listed. Some of the functions that are explained here included a description of the problem, a review of the background and context and an identification of gaps. Following this is “the content and the structure part” which involves the Swalesian moves analyses of the focus of the chapter. For instance, the content and structure section in Chapter 4, the main moves of the literature review of a thesis are explained as follows:

- (1) Establish some aspect of the knowledge territory relevant to your research
- (2) Create a research niche/gap in knowledge
- (3) Announce how you will occupy the research niche/gap (p. 67)

This is followed by a sample analysis of a section of a masters’ thesis. For these parts, Bitchener presents some portions from the sample master’s thesis with moves explained later in detail sentence by sentence. In Chapter 5, this section includes an analysis of the methodology section. Following this is usually key linguistic features that can help graduate students when they write their masters’ theses or dissertations. In the “Results” chapter, this section included some detailed information such as tense usage in the reporting of quantitative results, hedging, presenting qualitative results visually, etc.

It might be fair to say the use of “sample” thesis has advantages and disadvantages for such a guide. It is not distracting to read only one sample from the very beginning to the end of the book, as the reader becomes familiar with the topic of the same thesis. By the same token, having one and only example to refer to might also bring some issues. For instance, novice writers might take this sample and reproduce it as if it is a one-and-only template for thesis writing. This might impede and undermine second language writers’ creativity and individual voice in their writing. In addition, novice writers might take and generalize Cao’s individual style that is present in this sample thesis.

In the analyses sections which included moves analyses of the different parts of the masters’ thesis, the author provided two boxes of the same text, the first one being without the moves, and the second one being with the moves and an explanation of them. For those readers who are looking for a “how to” book, these parts can provide some exercises. But for those readers who are interested in the moves analyses of these sections, the parts without the moves can be redundant.

Still, the book includes frequently asked questions sections at the end of each chapter that deals with such important questions as “How long should the abstract be?” and “Should I write introduction before other chapters?” In addition, suggestions for further activities and further reading are included at the end of each section. These suggestions might not only help graduate students reflect on their writing practices about the issues discussed in each chapter of the book, but also help mentors, advisors and professors facilitate discussions about different parts of the thesis.

Reviewed by

Nur Yigtoglu

The Georgia State University, USA

dasnyy@langate.gsu.edu

© Copyright rests with authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.

Copyright © 1994 - 2010 TESL-EJ, ISSN 1072-4303

Copyright rests with the authors.