

Review of Discipline-Specific Phrases in selected Theses in Geography

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Abstract

This paper aimed to show the extent to which the state of academic writing as represented by some selected, useful phrases has been frequent in geography research at the University of Khartoum. It applied the statistical analytical, and the descriptive approaches to fifteen Ph.D. and master degrees written during the period 2000-2016. Major findings are depicted: the quality of the theses in the academic writing domain varies i.e. some are categorized as poor, some are excellent and others are in between. The paper recommends that research councils should develop good databases in academic writing along with capacity building initiatives to enhance both instructional practices and writing competence among supervisors and research students respectively.

1. Introduction

A simple definition of Academic writing is hard to come by, because it refers to writing done for several reasons and in different domains and disciplines. In our case, we would like to probe academic writing in education at its broader dimension and at the geography discipline in particular. A broad definition of academic writing in education will include any writing done to fulfil a requirement of university. Academic Writing is also used for publications that are conducted by teachers and researchers or papers presented in conferences or others. This broad definition of academic writing includes any writing assignment given in an academic setting. Examples of such include; translation, essays, research papers or research articles, academic journals, and dissertations and theses. Academic writing will pave the way to strengthening topics under discussion and it will give a hard start to making research theses well-articulated. The domain of research as depicted by research theses is of a paramount importance to exhibit different viewpoints as forwarded by different researchers to cover the complexity of the discussion in order to give clues as to where the most genuine aspects to be contained and considered. Useful academic writing phrases will equally furnish the ideal lessons to be learnt and adopt and teach readers to judge for themselves. The necessity of useful phrases in academic writing will equally be manifested in emphasizing some points and remarks in research theses by applying certain academic phrases.

Another area of academic writing believed to have been very significant is when we resort to summarizing very lengthy sections in theses in order to help readers to grasp what was presented. Summarizing might appear to be an easy job, but, in facts it is an art by itself not easy to be mastered by everyone. When we embark on summarizing lengthy subjects and converting them to just small phrases, then this simplicity and coherence will be highly attributed to academic writing through the useful phrases (Klacsankj, Nicholas).

There are two objectives that the paper attempts to achieve. First, it aims to show the extent to which the state of academic writing as represented by some useful phrases has been frequent in some selected graduate theses as an

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indication of the presence of academic writing. Second, the paper will try to identify the factors that hinder the usage of academic writing in the geographical domain and what plausible solutions could be forwarded to ameliorate it and pinpoint areas as to where due attention should be given.

2. Methodology

Data was collected from fifteen M.A and Ph.D. theses written by research students at the department of population and human studies at the Faculty of Geography. They covered different topics. These theses were subjected to thorough probing, taking the presence of the useful phrases as a yard stick to determine their frequency in academic writing.

Wall work A, in *English for writing research papers*, 2016, has lists frequently used phrases that have a general acceptance and can be used in all disciplines and in specific research theses. The phrases, according to him are well accepted by referees and readers as they frequently encounter them. He therefore suggests useful phrases used in academic writing in different thesis sections commencing by the abstract and finishing by the conclusion. These phrases will be utilized by us to scan through the chosen theses to give clues and presence and adoption of academic writing in the selected theses

The results were statistically exhibited and tackled to depict the distribution and trends of useful phrases among the selected theses in order to have a clear cut opinion about their presence as a prerequisite for further endeavours insofar as academic writing domain is concerned.

Many non-native speakers of English begin their writing career by reading extensively about their topic in English, and noting down useful generic phrases that they can then 'paste' into their own work. You can use such phrases as a template/structure for your paper into which you insert your own data. You at least know that these ready-made phrases are in correct English. You do not risk being accused of plagiarism because of the very generic nature of the phrases.

This document presents lists of frequently used phrases that have a general acceptance in all disciplines that you can use in specific sections of your paper. This means that they are phrases that referees and readers frequently encounter, and this will help to describe your findings using conventional language. This is important as referees and readers do not want to be disturbed by strange expressions that could easily be replaced by one of the standard phrases given. Where possible, the order of the useful phrases reflects the order that they might appear in a paper, and within a section. Thus the phrases should help to structure each chapter.

The same phrases may be needed in several chapters of research theses, as shown in table (1) below, (Wall work A).

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Table 1: Frequency of phrases

Abstract	1, 5 and possibly 2–4
Introduction	1–8, 9–16
Literature review	4, 9–16
Methods	17–30
Results	29–40
Discussion	35–45
Conclusions	45–51
Acknowledgements	52

A very comprehensive collection of useful phrases plus related advice can be found at <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>. The phrases were compiled by Dr. John Morley, Director of University-wide Language Programmes at the University of Manchester. Some of the phrases below have been adapted from that collection, and were subjected to translation as exhibited by table (1) in Arabic.

It should be noted that, and for the sake of concision, we selected some similar or quasi similar useful phrases to represent the whole lot in a particular chapter of the thesis, otherwise the paper will be distracted from its objectives (see the whole list in the appendix).

3. Data Limitations

It should be noted that the majority of the selected theses are written in Arabic. Only four of them are written in English. We resorted to translating the various useful phrases to Arabic language and then we embarked on scanning through them in the various theses. Another limitation is related to the fact that most of the theses is under probing were supervised by myself and here an element of bias might interfere and hence affect slightly the final results. It should be noted that, it will be very cumbersome to bring all the useful phrases cited by Klacsankj inside our paper because it will be very lengthy. To curb this shortcoming, we will resort to summarizing them in groups. Initially, we believed that the statistical representation of our results as it will be depicted by tables, will help our research, yet the long tables posed a problem and we will be obliged to incorporate them in the paper.

4. Background of the Selected Theses

The main themes of the theses under study, are all dealing with geographical topics on social, environmental, demographic aspects land use, water supply, urbanization...etc. Some of them were conducted during the then Department of Geography ,while the rest are belonging to the newly established Faculty of Geographical and Environmental Sciences , covering the period from 1999-2016.

A sample of fifteen MA ,MSC, and PhD theses were selected and all were subjected to thorough probing to depict the frequencies of academic writing as depicted by useful phrases are represented by scholars in the various theses. The results of our scanning were given in tables one and two (will be shown in a forthcoming appendices).

Generally speaking, in academic writing there are certain words and hence phrases believed to have been used consistently to convey ideas and thoughts of research students while conducting their higher degrees research. During

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such endeavour, an accumulation of useful academic writing phrases commence to materialize at the disposal of writers to go with their work as researchers be it in geography or other domains to constitute the arena of applying academic writing.

The domain of research theses is overt to all riches of knowledge and what precisely matters most is neat, clear academic writing to purge claims and opinions to secure viability and truthfulness. Without research, it is difficult to grasp your subject under probing. Logical explanation assisted by sound and useful academic writing phrases will help the readers to acquire new knowledge and comprehend and learn more about the subject under screening.

5. Discussion

The Results Of the state of academic writing at the Faculty of Geographical and Environmental Sciences, Department of Population and Human Studies, University of Khartoum, as shown by table (1), revealed that the theses' contents are represented by eight chapters or sections. They include: the abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results, conclusion, and finally the acknowledgement.

The first aspect exhibits the various sections or chapters of the theses. The second aspect shows the area of interest and the various subjects that should be tackled utilizing useful academic writing phrases. The third aspect, includes the detailed useful phrases as represented by numbers and each number is assigned to represent a series of useful academic writing phrases. The fourth aspect exhibits the frequencies of academic writing as represented in percentages among the fifteen theses. From the discussion, the following remarks can be depicted:

A) The Abstract:

In the abstract, five groups of useful phrases has been reported. About 93% of the theses under probing believed to have been using useful phrases in the research objectives. Using useful phrases to deal with historical background obtained a lowest score of only 13% in the abstract.

B) The Introduction:

The Introduction chapter as represented by a group of useful phrases, scored a high percentage of 93% among the theses indicating that the researchers are very aware of useful phrases needed while those theses with some problems constituted only 7%.

C) Literature Review:

This chapter is well tackled insofar as usage of useful phrases are concerned. About 60% of theses have dealt with the knowledge gaps using useful phrases, while 93% of the theses under study have tackled the previous studies in the theses using useful phrases.

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D) Methodology:

In scanning through the data, it is apparent that, the methodology which covers a wide range of useful phrases (17-30), has scored a full 100% implying that the authors of the selected theses are well acquainted with such phrases irrespective of the disparities among their tackled subjects.

E) The Results

From the table, the useful academic writing phrases for the results chapter, are exhibited by examples commencing from 29 to 40. The table equally shows that about 93% of the theses have utilized useful phrases to cover the results chapter. In view of such situation, the state of academic writing as represented by useful phrases for this important chapter, is excellent at the Geographical and Environmental Sciences Faculty.

F) Discussion:

From the information obtained, the state of usage of useful phrases to depict the discussion chapter, is covered by a group. Of phrases starting from 35 to 40. About 93% of the probed theses, adopt the usage of useful phrases.

G) Conclusion:

This chapter is represented by a group. Of useful phrases from 43 to 51. The frequencies of representation have conspicuous lyrics dropped for some portion of the chapter.

H) Acknowledgement:

This section of the theses has acquired one of the highest scores of 100% indicating that all the writers of the theses are well aware of such phrases.

6. Conclusion

It is clear that and despite the fact that the number of the selected theses is relatively small, yet the final results have shown that useful phrases are widely used by research students. It is also found that, the research students have received no training or assistance in the field of academic writing. Some of the research students have gained some knowledge depending on their own experience and the assistance of research supervisors. There are certain difficulties that face academic writing at our faculty that deserve an immediate action to surmount the various handicaps. Plausible actions can be formulated and forwarded to commence academic writing courses to ameliorate such situation. Many actions rend themselves at the concerned bodies disposal. These concerned bodies are the research councils at the Graduate College and the Geographical and Environmental Sciences Faculty Research Council. These bodies can embark on joint programmes meant to disperse the culture of academic writing among research students through ad hoc programmes to upgrade academic writing.

Based on the study findings a number of recommendations can be made. First, to guarantee continuance of this new culture, all the various departments at the Faculty of Geographical and Environmental Sciences should be engaged in studies of the sort augmenting the number of the samples theses to attain plausible results of academic writing in the faculty. Second, the Faculty should approve and issue formal procedures and guidelines to research students in academic writing domain. Third, certain formal procedures are needed to develop permanent structure at

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both Graduate College and the respective faculties for quality control and capacity building emphasizing academic writing issues. Third, an immediate action can be, taken i.e. Improve skills in academic writing through seminars and short courses and training sessions to be conducted by the Department of English and concerned faculties

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