

INVESTING INTO THE PRELIMINARY SECTIONS OF THE RESEARCH PAPER: IS THE GAME WORTH THE CANDLE?

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Currently the research paper (RP) is the central genre of many (perhaps all) disciplines at university level. Writing a research paper is no easy undertaking for L1 students and it goes without saying that it is one of the most demanding and time-consuming assignments for EFL students. Recent years have seen increased attention being given to RP writing, however, the focus is typically on what is called the body of the RP. For example, in his *Genre Analysis* Swales presents his famous IMRD pattern of an RP (1998, 133-7) and the CARS model of the introduction (*ibid.*, 222-4) but the preliminaries (except abstracts) are not included there (by preliminaries I mean titles, abstracts, acknowledgements, and outlines). True, he did investigate titles in an appendix of the book, but not acknowledgements or outlines. Typically prelims receive scant attention during practical RP writing courses as well since many teachers consider investigation into their properties merely a waste of valuable time.

The purpose of this article is to discover to what extent EFL students are familiar with different patterns of composing prelims and what problems they encounter. On the basis of the findings I expect to demonstrate that the preliminary sections of an RP (which are sometimes referred to as minor genres or subgenres) deserve attention and require considerable rhetorical expertise since there is more to them than meets the eye.

The corpus of the investigation is drawn from the texts of BA and MA theses composed by students of the English Philology Department, Vilnius University, in the year 2003-2006 and consists of 136 titles. To illustrate new developments in the area of composing RP titles texts of expert writers were used (examples (9), (10), (15), (16), (17), (18), (19)).

Due to the limited scope of the article the analysis will concern only titles and outlines. First I will investigate titles with a special focus on the following points: importance of RP titles; functions of RP titles; their syntactic and structural properties; language points; emerging trends and fashions in the area; frequency of occurrence of specific title patterns in students' texts. The next section will be devoted to problems concerning effective out-

lining including the rules to observe with reference to content and the rules to observe with reference to structure.

Why are RP titles **important**? Even though they consist, at best, of two or three lines, they play a significant role in the reception of the text, since the audience bases their decisions whether to read further basically on the title, outline, and the abstract. According to Swales, ‘it comes as little surprise that composing the few words of a title can take up inordinate amount of time, discussion, and mental effort’ (1998, 223).

Functions of Research Paper Titles

The key function of the RP title is that of **information** presented in a very concise and precise manner; sometimes the title is called ‘*the abstract of the abstract*’. According to Swales and Feak (1999, 205), adequate RP titles should indicate the topic of the study, the scope of the study, and be self-explanatory to the readers. In the following title ‘*One-member sentences in English*’ the topic may be clear, but not the focus; the title does not give any clues to whether the author is going to analyse these sentences from the point of view of their morphological characteristics, syntactic or semantic peculiarities, compare them with two –member sentences or find some other angle of approach.

Nowadays, however, a new and very important function seems to have emerged alongside with the informative one—it is that of promotion; in the increasingly competitive world of academia the title is expected to grab the attention of the reader (this function will be discussed in greater detail later.)

Syntactic and Structural Properties of Titles

The RP titles may take the form of nominal (1), gerundial (2), infinitival (3) phrases or (interrogative) sentences (4):

- (1) *Metadiscourse in English and Lithuanian Linguistic Papers*
- (2) *Exploiting Radio Programmes for Vocabulary Development*
- (3) *To Swear or not to Swear? An Overview of Swearing Peculiarities in Academic Society*
- (4) *Do Women Use More Emotive Elements in Their Language than Men?*

Frequently titles consist of two parts where separate parts follow the same pattern as one-part titles, i.e. they may take the form of a nominal phrase ((5), part 1 of (7), (8)); a gerundial phrase (6), interrogative sentences (part 2 of (7), (8)):

- (5) *Compliment Behaviour: a comparative analysis of compliments and compliment responses in English, Lithuanian, Russian, and Polish languages*
- (6) *Vocabulary Testing: measuring the size and depth of academic vocabulary of English Philology students*

- (7) *Evaluation in Linguistic Book Reviews: do men and women judge differently?*
- (8) *Metaphor and Culture: what do anthems of the EU old member states reveal?*

Lately, however, a new development—three-part titles—has been attested in the area of composing titles. Swales and Feak (2000, 55) are inclined to account for this phenomenon by disciplinary proclivities; according to them, representatives of life sciences seem to favour longer titles. On the other hand, this may be a strategy used by researchers to make up for the loss of information since abstracts tend to get smaller. The following three-part titles that serve as an illustration of this trend are drawn from the texts of expert writers:

- (9) *Recent Changes in the English Language. New Grammars? Or How Far Can You Go?*
- (10) *Every Great Man Has a Woman Behind Him. And every great woman has some man or other in front of her tripping her up. A study of Dorothy Sayer's 'Gaudy Night'.*

Language Points: hedging and intertextuality

Traditionally researchers were expected to present their findings in a non-categorical and unassuming manner. The linguistic means used for this purpose is *hedging/qualification*. Hedging in titles developed into a stereotypical formula which consists of the nominal phrase preceded by the prepositions ‘*on, towards*’:

- (11) *On the Structure of Live TV Interviews: types of exchanges*
- (12) *On the Use of Animal Names in English Idioms*
- (13) *Towards the English Concept of Shame: a diachronic analysis of the vocabulary of **shame***

It should be noted that the corresponding constructions of hedging are in wide use in many European languages, e.g., *Ueber... Zur Role...* (German), *K voprosu o..* (Russian), *Apie kai kuriuos...* (Lithuanian). So this seems to be a universal academic strategy of presenting oneself as a reliable and honest researcher.

Another interesting development in the area of composing RP titles is intertextuality; it is the use of culturally based expressions which depend heavily on the knowledge of a particular culture:

- (14) *To Swear or not to Swear? An overview of swearing peculiarities in academic society*
- (15) *ESP—the heart of the matter or the end of the affair?*
- (16) *The Rise of That and the Fall of Which. A case of monitored language change*

As befits an EFL student, in 14 we see a clear reference to Shakespeare. Example (15), composed by an expert writer, includes an allusion to the titles of two novels by Graham Green, while example (16) reminds us of *The History of the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, a once influential book by Edward Gibbon. Through the use of intertextuality

authors create the impression of ‘an insider’ who possesses and displays shared cultural knowledge.

New Developments

Recently there emerged a new pattern of composing a suggestive title which consists of a quote from the text followed by a nominal phrase. The examples that follow are drawn from the texts of expert writers:

(17) *I would like to thank my supervisor.* (Acknowledgements in graduate dissertations)

(18) *There’s a Bad Time Coming.* (Ecological vision in the fiction of D. H. Lawrence)

(19) *Love That Time Was not as Love Is Nowadays.* (Malory and adultery)

The quote gives an authentic touch to the title as well as adding an intriguing element. As mentioned above, the main function of the title is to inform the potential reader about the subject matter of the article in as pithy a way as possible; however, in the increasingly competitive world, which seems to embrace academia as well, writers devise various strategies to grab the attention of the reader. The most effective of them seem to be the use of quotes and intertextuality.

Frequency of Occurrence of Research Paper Title Patterns

What types of titles are prioritised by our students? Typically they are the titles which bear the form of nominal phrases (out of 136 titles 80 titles are composed as nominal phrases); then come two-part titles (33 all in all). Titles that contain infinitival constructions or (interrogative) sentences are very rare.

Interestingly, fairly similar findings were recorded with reference to the titles of the presentations delivered at the present conference. Out of 33 overall number of titles there are 16 two-part titles, 12 nominal phrases, 2 gerundial constructions, 1 title that has the form of a sentence and 1 title which includes hedging (starts with *towards*).

Thus the texts of both professional and novice writers seem to exhibit similar proclivities in this area though the conference titles composed by expert writers are more varied structurewise.

Outlines

Another important part of preliminaries is the outline or the contents page. Actually, there are several types of outlines—the **scratch outline** and the **formal outline**—that one usually makes use of while writing an RP. The scratch outline is usually devised at the beginning of the composing process and serves merely as a reminder of the points to be discussed (it is an outline for the writer) whereas constructing the formal outline is time consuming and

requires a considerable amount of rhetorical knowledge; it is usually completed after the paper is finished (it is an outline for the reader).

The purpose of the formal outline is to offer a quick summary of the text before one reads it. It is like a road map which informs the readers where they are going. In addition to the content, the outline presents the hierarchical structure of the text in a visually meaningful way by separating the main ideas from subideas. The headings in a formal outline may be expressed in phrases or in sentences; higher-level research papers typically prefer the phrase outline.

There are **two rules** to observe with reference to the content—first, the headlines must be meaningful; e.g. there is no need to inform the reader that a paper opens, closes, discusses, etc. It may be interesting to discover how much information one gains from the following outline:

- (20) *Outline*
- Acknowledgements*
- List of Illustrations*
- Abstract*
- Introduction*
- Data and Methods*
- Results and Discussion*
- Conclusions*
- References*

The only piece of information that one can possibly extract from this outline is that it refers to an RP. Actually, the title of this BA paper runs as follows: ‘*On the Rhetorical Structure and Evaluative Language of English and Lithuanian Art Reviews*’ but the information offered in the outline is too general; the author merely innumerates the constituent parts of the RP without adding any specific information relevant to the paper under discussion.

The second rule to observe with reference to content is that of parallel value; an outline is usually composed of several—two or three—levels and these levels should be equal in importance. Below is part of an outline where it has not been made clear which ideas are the most important and which are sub-ideas:

- (21) *Thematic adjuncts expressing spatial circumstances*
- Thematic adjuncts expressing spatial circumstances in text-initial sentences*
- Thematic adjuncts expressing spatial circumstances in text-developing sentences*
- Thematic adjuncts expressing directional spatial circumstances*
- Thematic adjuncts expressing non-directional spatial circumstances*

The improved version of this outline may look like this:

- (22) *1. Thematic adjuncts expressing spatial circumstances*
- 1.1. Thematic adjuncts expressing spatial circumstances in text-initial sentences*
- 1.2. Thematic adjuncts expressing spatial circumstances in text-developing sentences*
- 1.3. Thematic adjuncts expressing directional spatial circumstances*
- 1.4. Thematic adjuncts expressing non-directional spatial circumstances*

As we see, indentation plus the use of numbers help to reflect the hierarchical relationship in the outline by separating the main ideas from subideas.

Of lesser importance is the necessity to observe **parallel structure** as it pertains to the mechanical rather than the logical aspect of outlining. Nevertheless, all headings in an outline are expected to have the same grammatical structure. Does the outline below (23) conform to this rule?

- (23) 1. Introduction
2. Tendencies of realism in post-modern literature
3. Margaret Drabble is a post-modern writer appreciated for a realistic technique
4. Linguistic approach to literature

Here we see nominal phrases that alternate with a sentence; the way to improve the outline would be to use the same grammatical structure such as, for example, nominal phrases.

Conclusions

As the present research demonstrates, there are gaps in students' knowledge with reference to composing preliminaries. It is obvious that the skills of research paper writing should not be restricted to the main text alone. That is why the discussion of the preliminaries should be included in RP writing courses and textbooks and used as a kind of rhetorical consciousness-raising. In order to be accepted to the Western academic community we have to learn to organise our discourse in accordance with the established conventions of that community.

Besides, one should bear in mind certain pragmatic considerations with reference to the preliminaries—they are sometimes the only sections on which opponents base their decisions about the quality of the paper.

REFERENCES

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AR VERTA KREIPTI DĖMESĮ Į ĮVADINIS MOKSLINIO DARBO DALIS?

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Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje, remiantis pavyzdžiais, surinktais iš Anglų filologijos katedros studentų bakalauro ir magistrinių darbų, analizuojami tų darbų pavadinimai bei mokslinio darbo plano rašymo būdai. Pavadinimai nagrinėjami keliais aspektais – visų pirma, aptariama jų funkcijos,

tiriama jų sintaksinės ir struktūrinės ypatybės. Be to, nemaža dėmesio skiriama sąšvelnių (hedging) ir intertekstualumo naudojimui mokslinių darbų pavadinimuose, t.p. paminimi nauji efektingi būdai kurti pavadinimus. Kita straipsnio dalis skirta aptarti problemoms, kylančioms rašant mokslinio darbo planą. Išskiriami dviejų tipų sunkumai – susiję su darbo turiniu, kai planas yra per daug bendras ir neatspindi darbo turinio, ir sunkumai, susiję su plano forma – kai nesilaikoma tos pačios sintaksinės formos. Išvados teigiama, jog šios dvi įvadinės mokslinio darbo dalys, nors iš pirmo žvilgsnio ir galinčios atrodyti nelabai svarbios, iš tiesų atlieka rimtą informacinę bei reklaminę funkciją, todėl siūlant akademinio rašymo kursą, joms reikėtų skirti nemaža dėmesio.

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