

学术写作英语 研究导论

牛实华 著

THE INTRODUCTION TO ACADEMIC ENGLISH WRITING

中国铁道出版社

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内 容 简 介

本书是对学术论文进行英语写作的研究,全方位地分析和展示了学术论文英语写作的规律和技巧:从论文选题、语言学指导理论的融合,到写作的体裁性研究、写作者的写作立场和创作参与视角,再到所引用的信息与学科知识构建的交替结构,还有学术观点的展示等各个环节。

本书适合作为从事学术英语写作的各行各业人员的参考用书,也适合作为普通高等学校学生在练习用英语进行学术写作的教材。

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

学术写作英语研究导论/牛实华著. —北京:中国铁道出版社, 2017. 12
ISBN 978-7-113-23926-8

I. ①学… II. ①牛… III. ①英语-论文-写作
IV. ①H319.36

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2017)第317288号

书 名: 学术写作英语研究导论
作 者: 牛实华 著

策 划: 潘星泉
责任编辑: 潘星泉 田银香
封面设计: 刘 颖
责任校对: 张玉华
责任印制: 郭向伟

读者热线: (010)63550836

出版发行: 中国铁道出版社(100054,北京市西城区右安门西街8号)
网 址: <http://www.tdpress.com/51eds/>
印 刷: 北京建宏印刷有限公司
版 次: 2017年12月第1版 2017年12月第1次印刷
开 本: 880 mm × 1 230 mm 1/32 印张: 7.375 字数: 248千
书 号: ISBN 978-7-113-23926-8
定 价: 30.00元

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PREFACE

学术写作是对某个学科领域中的学术问题进行研究后所表述的科学研究成果。其体现形式往往是理论文章、著作或者研究报告等,同时具有科学性、创造性、理论性和平易性的特点。英语是全球的学术界进行交流的通用语言,大多数高水平学术成果的原创表达语言就是英语。这一方面避免了许多因为翻译不当而造成学术损失;另一方面也让关于学术写作的英语研究具有了极大实践价值。

学术研究写作作为高级写作中的一个重要部分,可以从以下角度被定义:它是学术语境中为从事学术研究、撰写研究报告、学期论文、书评、文章评论以及学位论文等特殊写作目的的服务的一种写作方式。因为在任何学术环境中,以及各种写作语篇类型中,学术研究论文是追求语言、思维同业务知识能力融合的最佳体现。如何用英语来完美地表达学术研究成果,就如同如何给一座宏伟的建筑打下牢固的地基一样重要。由此,它在学术界已经引起了广泛的关注,大量针对培养学术写作的英语能力的教材和研究著作也均已出版发行。

本书一方面介绍了学术写作英语的文体和风格;另一方面探讨了学术写作英语教学的若干方法。它有两个显著特点:一是在学术写作英语教学中建立和运用写作语料库;二是论述了学术写作英语中作者的视角和定位问题。对这两个问题的深入研究对于指导国内外广大教师的学术写作英语研究和教学实践会大有裨益。

本书在撰写过程中注意突出该写作阶段英语运用的层次高、应用面广、学术性强等特点,注重培养读者的思辨能力,特别是使用英语写作和发表专业学术论文的实际能力;并力求从实际出发,注重引用理论的先进性、针对性和导向性,确保内容全面、材料翔实、例证丰富、语言规范。全书的编写语言均为英语,做到了“用英语来阐释学术写作”,以求更原汁原味地探讨驾驭这一语言工具的规律,提高学习者的

学术论文撰写能力。

本书共分 13 章,由哈尔滨金融学院商务英语系牛实华教授著。在此仍要对提出过真诚意见的同行们表示诚挚的谢意。最后,由于笔者水平所限,书中不足之处,敬请同行批评指正。

著 者
2017 年 9 月



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Chapter 1 Writing Researching

Writing is fundamental to modern societies and of overarching significance in all our lives: central to our personal experiences, life chances, and social identities. Its complex, multifaceted nature, however, is difficult to pin down and as a result, many research approaches have emerged to help clarify both how writing works and the purposes it is employed to achieve. Research, in fact, has taken philosophical, historical, empirical and critical directions, and encompasses a wide range of different interpretive and quantitative methods. In this chapter I will briefly summarize and evaluate some of these and illustrate a sample study.

1. Assumptions, writing and research

First of all, it is important to recognize that writing research does not simply involve fitting suitable methods to particular questions. Methods are inseparable from theories and how we understand writing itself. For some people, writing is a product, an artifact of activity which can be studied independently of users by counting features and inferring rules. For others, it is a kind of cognitive performance which can be modeled by analogy with computer processing through observation and writers' on-task verbal reports. A third group sees it as the ways we make our social worlds and explore how writing connects us with readers and institutions in particular contexts.

Different methods tell us different things about writing, but they always start with our preconceptions. Simplifying a complex picture, it is possible to group research methods according to their principal focus and whether they are concerned with illuminating our understanding of texts, writers, or readers.

1) Text-oriented research

This views writing as an outcome of activity, as words on a page or screen and can be descriptive (revealing what occurs), analytical (interpreting why it occurs), or critical (questioning the social relations which underlie and are reproduced by what occurs). Texts can also be examined in a variety of ways,

looking at particular features or their themes, cohesive elements, or moving structures. We can examine a text in isolation or as a sample from a single genre, time period, or writer, and we can collect a number of texts together as a corpus and aggregate those features as representative of other texts.

Traditionally, research into texts followed views inherited from structuralism and implied in the *Transnational Grammar of Noah Chomsky*. Texts were seen as langue, or a demonstration of the writer's knowledge of forms and grammatical rules rather than attempts to communicate, and methods were the means of revealing principles of writing independent of any actual contexts or users. From this perspective, writing improvement is measured by counting increases in features seen as important to successful writing and calculating the "syntactic complexity" of texts by counting the number of words or clauses per T-unit and the number of T-units per sentence. There is, however, little evidence to show that syntactic complexity or grammatical accuracy are either the principal features of writing development or the best measures of good writing. Essentially, viewing texts in this way ignores their role as communicative acts and how they function as a writer's response to a particular communicative setting. Because all texts include what writers suppose their readers will know, and how they will use the text, no text can be fully explicit or universally "appropriate". Rather, they need to balance what needs to be said against what can be assumed.

2) Writer-oriented research

This emphasizes the actions of writers rather than the features of texts. Champions of this approach believe that writing constitutes a process, or at least a complex of activities, from which all writing emerges and that this is generalissimo across contexts of writing. Interest here is on what good writers do when they write, principally so that these strategies can be taught to students. Early work assumed that writing is more of a problem-solving activity than an act of communication and drew on the tools and models of cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence to reveal how people engage in a writing task to create and revise personal meanings. More recent work has given greater emphasis to the actual performance of writing in a particular context, exploring what Nystrand (1987) calls the situation of expression, to investigate the personal and social histories of individual writers as they write in specific contexts.

The goal is to describe the influence of this context on the ways writers represent their purposes in the kind of writing that is produced. As Prior observes: Actually writing happens in moments that are richly equipped with tools (material and semiotic) and populated with others (past, present, and future). When seen as situated activity, writing does not stand alone as the discrete act of writer, but emerges as on-fluency of many streams of activity: reading, talking, observing, acting, malting, thinking, and feeling as well as transcribing words on paper.

By using detailed observations of acts of writing, participant interviews, analyses of surrounding practices, and other techniques, researchers seek to develop more complete accounts of local writing contexts.

A range of methods have been employed to explore and elaborate the composing process, moving beyond text analysis to the qualitative methods of the human and social sciences. Case study research has been particularly productive, focusing on “natural scenes” rather than on experimental environments, and often seeking to describe writing from an emic perspective, privileging the views of insiders or those participating in a situation. These studies have thus made considerable use of “think aloud protocols”, or writers’ verbal reports while composing and uses multiple techniques which may include recall protocols, and analyses of several drafts.

However, while these descriptions give significant attention to the experiences of writers and to their understandings of the local features of the context they deal with as they write, concentrating on the local setting fails to captures the culture and event within which the action is embedded and which their writing must invoke. Texts do not function communicatively at the time they are composed but when they are read, as they anticipate particular readers and the responses of those readers to what is written. Texts evoke a social milieu which intrudes upon the writer and activates specific responses to recurring tasks and as a result most current writing research takes a more reader-oriented view to explore the ways writers see their audience and engage in cultural contexts.

Relater-oriented research looks beyond individual writers and the surface structures of products to see texts as examples of discourse, or language in use. Discourse approaches recognize that texts are always a response to a particular

communicative setting and seek to reveal the purposes and functions which linguistic forms serve in texts. Here texts are not isolated examples of competence but the concrete expressions of social purposes, intended for particular audiences. The writer is seen as having certain goals and intentions, certain relationships to his or her readers, and certain information to convey, and the forms a text takes are resources used to accomplish these. Writing is therefore seen as mediated by the institutions and cultures in which it occurs and every text is embedded in wider social practices which carry assumptions about writer-reader relationships and how these should be structured. These factors draw the analyst into a wider paradigm which locates texts in a world of communicative purposes, institutional power, and social action, identifying the ways that texts actually work as communication.

One way writers are able to construct an audience is by drawing on their own knowledge of other texts and by exploiting readers' abilities to recognize inter-textuality between texts. This view owes its origins to Bakhtin's (1986) view that language is fundamentally dialogic, a conversation between writer and reader in an ongoing activity. Writing reflects traces of its social uses because it is multiply linked and aligned with other texts upon which it builds and which it anticipates. "Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known and somehow takes them into account". A key idea here is that of genre, a term for grouping texts together and referring to the repertoire of linguistic responses writers are able to call on to communicate in familiar situations.

Genre reminds us that when we write we follow conventions for organizing messages because we want our readers to recognize our purposes. Research into genres therefore seeks to show how language forms work as resources for accomplishing goals, describing the stages which help writers to set out their thoughts in ways readers can easily follow, and identifying salient features of texts which allow them to engage effectively with their readers.

2. An overview of methods

While I have divided methods up according to the paradigms with which they are mainly associated, much writing research combines several methods, often both quantitative and qualitative, to gain a more complete picture of a complex reality. In fact, the concept of triangulation, or the use of multiple

sources of data, or approaches, can bring greater plausibility to the interpretation of results. It obviously makes sense to view research pragmatically, adopting whatever tools seem most effective and a researcher may, for example, gather students' opinions about their writing practices through a questionnaire and supplement this with interview or diary data, and with the drafts of their essays, mixing methods to increase the validity of the eventual findings.

Another feature of writing research is that it tends to favor data gathered in naturalistic rather than controlled conditions. This is not to say that methods that elicit data through questionnaires, structured interviews or experiments are not employed or that they have nothing to tell us about writing. It is simply that there has been a strong preference for collecting data in authentic circumstances not specifically set up for the research, such as via classroom observations or analyses of naturally occurring texts. The main methods for researching writing are summarized in Figure 1 (Hyland, 2003) and discussed briefly below.

Figure 1 Main data collection methods for researching writing

Questionnaires	Highly focused elicitations of respondent self-reports about actions and attitudes
Interviews	Adaptable and interactive elicitations of respondent self-reports
Verbal reports	Retrospective accounts and think-aloud reports of thoughts while composing
Written reports	Diary or log accounts of personal writing or learning experiences
Observation	Direct or recorded data of live interactions or writing behavior
Texts	Study of authentic examples of writing used for communication in a natural context
Case studies	A collection of techniques capturing the experiences of participants in a situation

1) Elicitation: questionnaires and interviews

These are the main methods for eliciting information and attitudes from informants. Questionnaires are widely used for collecting large amounts of structured, often numerical, easily analyzable self-report data, while interviews offer more flexibility and greater potential for elaboration and detail. Both allow researchers to tap people's views and experiences of writing. But interviews tend to be more qualitative and heuristic, questionnaires more quantitative and

conclusive. Questionnaires are particularly useful for exploratory studies into writing attitudes and behaviors, and for identifying issues that can be followed up later by more in-depth methods. One major use of questionnaires in writing research has been to discover the kinds of writing target communities require from students. Rogerson-Revell (2007), for example, used a questionnaire to shed light on participants' use of English in business meetings in a European company and to identify some of the language difficulties that can result.

Interviews offer more interactive and less predetermined modes of eliciting information. Although sometimes little more than oral questionnaires, interviews generally represent a very different way of understanding human experience, regarding knowledge as generated between people rather than as objectified and external to them. Participants are able to discuss their interpretations and perspectives, sharing what writing means to them rather than responding to preconceived categories. This flexibility and responsiveness means that interviews are used widely in writing research to learn more about writing practices (to discover the genres people write and how they understand and go about writing); about teaching and learning practices (to discover people's beliefs and practices about teaching and learning); and about discourse (to discover how text users see and respond to particular features of writing). Interviews are particularly valuable as they can reveal issues that might be difficult to predict, such as the kinds of problems that students might have in understanding teacher feedback (Hyland, 2001).

2) Introspection: verbal and written reports

The use of verbal reports as data reflects the idea that the process of writing requires conscious attention and that at least some of the thought process involved can be recovered, either as a retrospective written or spoken recall or simultaneously with writing as a think-aloud protocol.

Protocols involve participants writing in their normal way but instructed to verbalize all thinking at the same time so that information can be collected on their decisions, their strategies and their perceptions as they work. Think-aloud data have been criticized as offering an artificial and incomplete picture of the complex cognitive activities involved in writing. For one thing many cognitive processes are routine and internalized operations and therefore not available to verbal description, while more seriously, the act of verbal reporting

may itself slow task progress or distort the process being reported on. But despite these criticisms, the method has been widely used, partly because the alternative is to deduce cognitive processes solely from subjects' behavior, and this would obviously be far less reliable. Think-aloud techniques have been extremely productive in revealing the strategies writers use when composing, particularly what students do when planning and revising texts. In one study, for example, de Larios et al. (1999) used the method to examine what students did when they were blocked by a language problem or wanted to express a different meaning, tracing the patterns they used in searching for an alternative syntactic plan.

Diaries offer an alternative way of gaining introspective data. These are first-person accounts of a language using experience, documented through regular entries in a journal and then analyzed for recurring patterns or significant events. Diarists can be asked to produce "narrative" entries which freely introspect on their learning or writing experiences, or be set guidelines to restrict the issues addressed. These can be in the form of detailed points to note (write about what you found most/least interesting about this class) or a loose framework for response (note all the work you did to complete this task). Alternatively, researchers may ask diarists to concentrate only on "critical incidents" of personal significance or to simply record dates and times of writing. While some diarists may resent the time and intrusion involved, diaries provide a rich source of reflective data which can reveal social and psychological processes difficult to collect in other ways. Thus Nelson (1993) used diaries to discover how her students went about writing a research paper, following their trail through the library, how they evaluated sources and took notes, the conversations they had with others, decisions they made, and so on. This approach provided a rich account of writers' reflections, suggesting why they acted as they did and how they saw contextual influences.

3) Observation

While elicitation and introspective methods provide reports of what people say they think and do, observation methods offer actual evidence of it by systematic documentation of participants engaged in writing and learning to write. They are based on conscious noticing and precise recording of actions as a way of seeing these actions in a new light. Once again there are degrees of

structure the researcher can impose on the data, from simply checking predefined boxes at fixed intervals or every time a type of behavior occurs, to writing a full narrative of events. The most highly structured observations employ a prior coding scheme to highlight significant events from the mass of data that taped or live observation can produce (see Hyland, 2003 for examples). All observation will necessarily privilege some behaviors and neglect others, as we only record what we think is important, but while a clear structure is easier to apply and yields more manageable data, such pre-selection may ignore relevant behavior that wasn't predicted.

Observation is often combined with other methods, as in Camitta's (1993) three year study of vernacular writing among adolescents. She observed and interviewed writers of different races and genders between the ages of 14 and 18 outside school, in free school time when they clustered in groups to talk and write, and in writing surreptitiously in class. She found that these students produced a wide variety of genres and that when writing was free of school constraints it generated considerable interest and much oral sharing.

4) Text data

Finally, a major source of data for writing research is writing itself. While texts can be approached in a variety of ways, most research now seeks to discover how people use language in specific contexts. The main approaches to studying written texts are currently genre and corpus analyses.

(1) Genre analysis. This embraces a range of tools and attitudes to texts, from detailed qualitative analyses of a single text to more quantitative counts of language features. Sometimes researchers work with a single text, either because it is inherently interesting or because it seems representative of a larger set of texts or particular genre. A major policy speech, a newspaper editorial or an important scientific article can offer insights into forms of persuasion, particular syntactic or lexical choices, or the views of text writers. More generally, a sample essay may shed light on students' uses of particular forms or the assumptions underlying different choices. Habitat (1993) suggests some basic steps for conducting a genre analysis which emphasize the importance of locating texts in their contexts (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Steps in genre analysis

1	Select a text which seems representative of the genre you want to study
2	Place the text in a situational context, i. e. use your background knowledge and text clues to guess where the genre is used, by whom, and why it is written the way it is
3	Compare the text with other similar texts to ensure that it broadly represents the genre
4	Study the institutional context in which the genre is used (through site visits, interviews, manuals, etc.) to better understand its conventions
5	Select a focus for analysis (moves, les, cohesion, persuasion, etc.) and analyze it
6	Check your analysis with a specialist informant to confirm your findings and insights

Such an approach forms a case study, but while this is a widely recognized method, it raises questions about how far a single can be representative of a genre. Representational is strengthened if several texts are analyzed, and corpus analyses, drawing on evidence from large databases of electronically encoded texts, are the main way of achieving this.

(2) Corpus analysis. A corpus is simply a collection of naturally occurring language samples (often consisting of millions of words) which represent a speaker's experience of language in some restricted domain, thereby providing a more solid basis for genre descriptions. A corpus provides an alternative to intuition by offering both a resource against which intuitions can be tested and a mechanism for generating them. This enables analysts to depict what is usual in a genre, rather than what is simply grammatically possible, and helps to suggest explanations for why language is used as it is in particular contexts.

Corpus studies are therefore based on both qualitative and quantitative methods, using evidence of frequency and association as starting points for interpretation. Frequency is based on the idea that if a word, string or grammatical patter occurs regularly in a particular genre or sub-set of language, then we can assume it is significant in how that genre is routinely constructed. Association refers to the ways features associate with each other in collocation patterns. A concordance programme brings together all instances of a search word or phrase in the corpus as a list of unconnected lines of text and so allows the analyst to see regularities in its use that might otherwise be missed. In other words, we can see instances of language use when we read these lines horizontally and evidence of system when we read them vertically, pointing to

common usage in this genre.

In a study of the acknowledgement sections from 240 masters' and doctoral dissertations, for example, I found a strong tendency to use the noun in preference to other expressions of gratitude (Hyland, 2004). Sorting concordance lines on the word to the left of this search word revealed this noun was modified by only three adjectives: special, sincere and deep with special making up over two-thirds of all cases.

3. A sample study

To illustrate some of these ideas and to show what one approach to writing research looks like in practice, the remainder of this chapter reports on a study undergraduates' writing I conducted a few years ago (Hyland, 2002). I will discuss the main stages under four headings: framing the issue, selecting methods, collecting data.

1) Framing the issue

The study emerged from a sense that my undergraduate student had considerable problems constructing a credible representation of themselves and their work in their research writing. They seemed reluctant to claim an appropriate degree of authoritativeness in their texts and to get behind their statements, making their work seem anonymous and disembodied. I decided to pursue these impressions by investigating how these students used authorial pronouns, framing the issue by relating the use of first person to rhetorical identity. This sees identity as less a phenomenon of private experience than a need for affiliation and recognition in particular social networks. When we write in particular genres there is strong pressure to take on the its forms and represent ourselves in a way valued by that community. This does not mean that writers simply slot into ready-made identities, but it limits individual maneuver. Newcomers, however, often find that the discourses of their disciplines support identities very different from those they bring with them from their home cultures which prevent them from communicating appropriate commitments and undermine their relationship to readers.

2) Selecting methods

Framing pronoun use in terms of the constraints on rhetorical conventions of personality suggested two possible lines of inquiry. Basically, to adopt an ethnographic approach and focus on particular writers, investigating their

personal and social histories and how these influenced their writing of academic assignments; or to look for preferred choices of pronoun use in a representative collection of student writing and interview writers about their choices. I decided on the latter, partly because I was more comfortable with the methods involved and partly because I wanted a wider picture of how they saw the demands of the task and chose to represent themselves in this context. A corpus approach offers a starting point for analysis by providing quantitative information about the relative frequency and use of self-mention, pointing to systematic tendencies in students' choices of meanings. To understand why writers made the choices they did I decided to support the text data with interviews, using focus groups as a way of reducing the threat to these L2 students.

3) Collecting data

To ensure that the text samples were representative of undergraduate research writing, I compiled a corpus of 64 final year project reports, a genre of 8,000 to 12,000 words and by far the most substantial piece of writing students do in their undergraduate careers. I obtained a broad cross-section of academic practice by collecting eight reports from each of eight different degree programs, including sciences, engineering, social sciences, technology, and business. This involved getting agreement from writers and electronic copies of their reports. I make computer-archer corpus for the first person uses I, me, my, we, us, our mine, and ours using a commercially available concordance programme, and checked all cases to ensure they were exclusive first person uses.

While corpus analyses are excellent for telling us what writers do, to stop here runs the danger of reformatting conventions rather than explaining them. I therefore conducted interviews with a supervisor from each field and with student writers. The supervisors were asked about their own writing, that of their students, and their impressions of disciplinary practices. The student interviews required more scaffolding and a more supportive environment and were conducted as focus groups of four or five students. All interviews had two parts. First, I asked participants to respond to features in selected texts as either writers or members of the readership for whom the texts were composed as a way of making explicit the tacit knowledge or strategies that they brought to acts of composing or reading. This was followed by more general observations of