A Global View on Writing Research Articles for International Journals: Principles & Practices[1]

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Abstract

This contribution provides a global view in two senses: first, it claims that the principles and practices of good research articles in English are similar in most English Departments world-wide, and second, it emphasizes that the planning and writing of journal articles should start from a global perspective, i.e. the sequence of chapters should be planned first, the sequence of paragraphs in the sections second, and the individual sentences last. It is particularly addressed to young scholars and thus discusses how to find an appropriate topic, an appropriate journal, an appropriate title. It starts with modern key issues like finding a research question or a research hypothesis and key concepts like academic discourses, metalanguage, and genres, with journal conventions in the centre. The focus of this contribution is on global thinking and editing: The writer starts at the macro-level, the global paradigm, the sequence of chapters and headlines, and concrete examples are taken from current articles in journals that are easily accessible and recommended to African scholars. At the meso-level, managing the information and argumentation flow within and beyond paragraphs is particularly important for effective communication. Finally, at the micro-level, the controversial issues of intertextuality and plagiarism and of idiomaticity and transparency are discussed. All this is summarized in the conclusion, which gives advice to young African academics who wish to start a career within the English research community.

Keywords: Academic writing, global perspective, structure, plagiarism

1. Global views on Writing

1.1. Meanings of "global"

By "global" view, I mean something like a bird's eye view, a top-down or holistic approach to journal articles and research articles. I distinguish between a macro-, meso- and micro-level: By macro-level I mean a chapter or a section, by meso-level I mean a paragraph and by micro-level I mean a sentence – and I think it is

[1] The journal article is a broader and more neutral term. It is not so strict in its format (IMRaD), as explained. It can also be more theoretical and then it may also require more experience, if it is a good journal article. Therefore, I have focussed on the research article which may be difficult, but in the end easier for a young scholar. A research paper can be relatively restricted, and if it is data-based, it will also be accepted more easily.

really unfortunate that most writers or most style guide books concentrate on the micro-level only. I think that planning a project and a piece of writing (Buckingham 2016) should start from the highest level and result in a draft, after which a considerable amount of work still remains to edit the text. I usually tell my students: "Don't hand in your first draft." Students do not spend enough time on editing – and on planning. So I tell them that they should spend at least 20% of the time on the planning instead of writing immediately. They often just manage a first draft and I tell them: "This is only half of it, you still need to invest a lot of time and hard work – at least 30% of the whole work is on editing."

Another global perspective is the writing of a journal article focussing on the result, and here a bird's eye view should mean some 20% introduction, 60% main part but also 20% conclusion; from experience, I can say that in many texts the conclusions are often too short and do not really wind up enough what should be the main focus of the text.

1.2. Meanings of "writing"

When I say writing here, I want to emphasize that today we have all types of literacy, not only the traditional literacy or the now well-known multimedia literacy. I also mean the literacy of (reading and writing) academic texts, which includes the collection of information, the processing of information and the presentation of information in a new context. This literacy is an advanced skill – much more advanced than the usual four or five skills that we teach in practical language classes. I see the presentation of academic knowledge from a constructivist perspective, and I would like to emphasize two main points: the first is discourse community, the academic readership/audience in our field; the second is genre, the text type conventions expected in our discourse community (Swales 1990, Swales/Feak 2012). These expectations are partly in contrast to the writers' personal identity, because writers always say something about their background, their academic training, etc. and they have their own way of liaising with their academic discourse community (Hyland 2012). And all this needs to be learned; writers cannot wait for a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", as Wordsworth wrote. Academic writing is a craft and hard work - partly also, because academic writing includes a complete set of metalanguage, which is expected in the discourse community and enshrined in the conventions of the discipline.

2. First steps: From pre-writing activities to first draft

2.1. Finding a topic

Before writing, there is reading. This is partly because there are two approaches to finding a topic: first, top-down, from theory to practice, through reading. Theoretically, young scholars read "the literature" on the topic, find a gap and say "this gap needs to be filled". If it is a large gap, the topic has be narrowed down, so that

it is manageable, operational (Buckingham 2016: 5-10, with examples). The problem is that this is a really difficult approach because we can never be sure whether there is really a gap or whether we just have not read enough. A lot of students thus postpone their writing, because they have the feeling that maybe it is only them who see the gap. A better approach through reading is to find a model article in the research literature and say "I would like to do something like this, hopefully with my own new data". The second approach is a bottom-up approach: from data to analysis, i.e. when I see some striking or at least interesting feature in the data, I can say "this must be worth exploring" or maybe even more difficult "I can do some statistical analyses or maybe even find the patterns in the data that I did not see with my own eyes". And then in the data, beyond the purely statistical, I can "see a rationale", maybe a functional reason why the language is used in this way. These two different approaches are possible; in the end, finding a model article is probably the easiest way for a young scholar, but that depends on the accessibility of journals.

2.2. Finding a journal

Although in many developing countries researchers and PhD students are given lists of accepted journals (of course, international, peer-reviewed, with high impact factor), it seems more advisable to follow the advice (or only the footsteps) of peers and colleagues, who have successfully published in journals. Alternatively, you could approach journals that you know from reading in your field and that have published useful model articles (cf. 4.3. below); they may be interested in continuing the academic discourse in the same field.

2.3. Finding a research hypothesis

One of the most challenging tasks for young scholars is to set up a working hypothesis (Buckingham 2016: 9). It does not have to be a final one, hypotheses are provisionally set up on the basis of reading and accepted as a basis for further research. Many hypotheses cannot be tested convincingly and many cannot be confirmed but this can still be a good academic result. Actually, a clever strategy is a null hypothesis, e.g. "there is no difference between two groups of people interacting or two types of language usage for us", and if you can reject a null hypothesis, which says there is no difference, then you can prove that there is a, maybe text linguistic, maybe sociolinguistic difference between your datasets. It is easier to falsify a hypothesis by finding just one case that does not fit. Research hypotheses and research questions are much more important in English studies today than 50 years ago, as they were taken over from natural and social sciences. They serve three purposes at the beginning of an academic discourse: to determine what kind of research the writer will be doing, to raise expectations in the readers, and to identify the specific objectives the study will focus on. Formulating a good research hypothesis is a methodologically central issue in advanced writing and has

to be practiced in the context of advanced empirical research methodologies (Hofmann 2018).

2.4. Finding a research question

For young researchers, it may be easier to formulate research questions than research hypotheses, bearing in mind that many research questions may be asked, but few can be answered satisfactorily with the tools available (cf. section 2.5. below). I can give you two examples of my own research questions, although I have to admit that in this case the research questions are not written down explicitly in these two texts: the first one is my PhD thesis, which was on "English in Tanzania", and the research question there is "Is Tanzania a second language country or an international language country (which is sometimes called a foreign language country today)?". Because in contrast to Nigeria, the biggest and prototypical second language country in Africa, the situation in Tanzania then and even today is not so clear because they have Kiswahili as a nation-wide accepted national language. In my postdoctoral thesis, I compared British and Indian English using an established corpus with different text types or genres and here the research question was "Is the variation in relative constructions greater between the varieties [i.e. British and Indian English] than between different genres within these varieties?", and the result was, in a nutshell, there is more variation within varieties than between British and Indian English. But of course, grammatical constructions – like relative constructions – are never observed as distinguishing varieties of English as much as pronunciation and the lexicon, for instance (cf. Quirk et al. 1985). But these would be typical research questions, which are expected today, but were not expected 30 years ago when I wrote these texts.

2.5. Critical issues: access to infrastructure, equipment, etc.

Finally, I also want to mention that it is not always easy to answer research questions adequately, and you have to ask yourself critically: "Is, what I can do, sufficient to answer this research question in an academic way?", for instance "Can I collect recordings that are good enough for differentiating patterns in phonetics?" or "Can I collect 'representative' samples of social media discourse in Nigeria as a basis for an analysis of Nigerian usages of 'democrat*'?".

Nowadays, questions of technical equipment seem negligible, but not in all African universities: everyone has a smartphone, but of course recordings in a conference hall are not good enough for linguistic analyses – at least phonetic ones. Or African scholars have to ask themselves: "Is my internet connection stable enough, so that I can use HTTrack to download (huge amounts of messy) newspaper texts over night?" "Do I have at least access to an eye-tracker to do reading research seriously? … so that I can see how readers process language, where they stop, when a word is unclear or where they drift off, when they have their own idea related to what they hear or read?" (cf. Schmied & Hofmann 2018).

Unfortunately, many interesting research questions cannot be answered satisfactorily, because they cannot be transformed into an operational research strategy, at least today, by a poor individual researcher in a specific (unfavourable) research environment – and this applies to African scholars more than to others.

2.6. Finding a title and subtitle

Another way of focussing, and marketing an article for a journal, is an attractive title and often subtitle. I can suggest three paradigms of finding an appropriate title: for instance, you could have a "sexy" quotation which is striking, provocative or at least interesting, and then after a colon explain the topic and the method if possible; or one could indicate a broad research area in the title and then add a more specific research question; or, one can have a research question first and then explain what that means in context. The choice is between a more sexy, journalistic title and a more descriptive one, between a striking quotation and more academic phrases indicating data (*MA theses*), methodology (*corpus-linguistic*), theoretical framework (*systemic functional grammar*) or context of application (*education*, *teaching*).

Here are some examples from texts written by participants in the Benin workshop. A title can include a strong statement like "Religious Bigots or Extremists?", which is, of course, provocative in a university context, but maybe not in social media; or, "PDP Administration Actively Sustained a Crisis Profiteering from it", a clear attack on a political party, but easily found in social media. A much more serious article would be "Constructing Religion and Politics in Nigerian Terrorism News". Of course, the same article can be used with a different, more journalistic title, like "Nigerian Terrorism News" – a broad area, so you might want to specify: "Who Blames Whom and How?" This is basically the same as "Religion or Politics? Linguistic Devises Used in Nigerian Terrorism News". The writer has to decide which of these possible titles is appropriate for which journal.

Another interesting case is a nice African language exercise in one of the workshop articles entitled "Bokyi noun class system", where I noticed that, like in most drafts, the headlines or the titles could be made much better. One possibility is "A New Analysis of Bokyi Noun Phrases: Noun Classes, Agreement, and Valency". The "new" promises something, the three linguistic details make it sound scholarly. You can also ask explicitly the research questions "Is Bokyi a Bantu Language? A New Analysis of Noun Phrases", and of course, noun phrases include Classes, Agreement, and Valency. Both of these articles are quite attractive and still linguistically specific enough. The question of which one is better depends on the journal, where you want to "sell" this article.

In more general terms: What is an effective title? It is effective, if it fulfils one or more of the following functions: A title has to indicate the theoretical, regional or academic discourse context in which the text should be understood. It orients the reader towards the topic research area. In form, it strikes the balance between brevity and clarity. It must be really understandable, so it should indicate enough, but not reveal too much: it should not pre-empt your conclusion and the main point:

It should make further reading beyond the title, beyond the abstract, interesting, attractive, maybe useful (cf. Hannay & Mackenzie 2017: 51).

I can illustrate this here with four examples of complex titles again from my own writing. One is the book we have edited recently called "Working with Media Texts. Deconstructing and Constructing Crises in Europe". Another one is an article entitled "Complexity and Coherence in English Student Writing, Specifically in Hypertext Learning Systems" which I wrote almost 20 years ago at the beginning of the world-wide web when hypertext was relatively new. Or "Where the grass is greener? Colour terms in East African English". Many African languages have relatively few colour terms and then questions can be asked like: "How many colour terms are used by African writers?" or "Is *rose* or *pink* in the second or third circle of colours?" The fourth title is, similarly, a wide area plus a specific case: "Corpus-Based Contrastive Lexicology: the Case of English *with* and its German Translation Equivalents". These are examples of what I think could be effective titles in the sense that they may make the reader curious and they may convince the journal editor to accept the contribution.

2.7. Abstract?

Whether an abstract should be written before or after the journal article is an old question. In any case, the abstract must be revised after the article is completed, especially if the writer feels that he/she has not be able to completely deliver what he/she had promised at the beginning of the writing project. This distinguishes a journal abstract from a conference abstract, which is more a promise of something that may be delivered by the time the conference takes place and is (usually) not altered even if the presenter cannot keep all the promises and may not be able to fulfil the expectations. In our discussion of pre-writing activities, an abstract may help the writer to focus his/her ideas and is thus for many a good exercise before the actual writing of the article.

2.8. Scaffolded writing

Finally, we have to start writing. In many writing classes today, scaffolded writing is practised. As the metaphor suggests, this approach assumes that this is a process of enculturation into social practices with supported interaction with people who have already mastered the discourse, as is the case in an academic writing workshop. For individual writers, this is less easy, but generally it may help the writer to complete the big global task, when a complex text like a journal paper is broken down into smaller fixed structures like the IMRaD paradigm discussed below (4.1. – 4.2.). Then many small steps or obligatory and optional moves (Swales 1990) steadily take the writer further and further. Good practice examples may also serve as models, which make the task less daunting than a complete individual start from Introduction to Conclusion. Of course, this approach also can only lead to a first draft, which has to be revised constantly to bring it closer to the ideal set up by the self-critical writer and, in some cases, the constant interventions of experienced mentors that guide young scholars from academic novice to research discourse (Fig. 1).

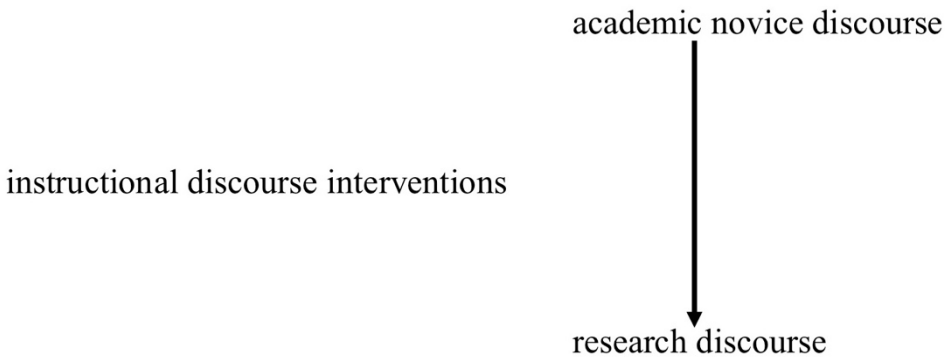


Figure 1: Through instructional discourse from novice to research discourse.

3. Key concepts

3.1. Discourses in academic communication

Over the last few years, European universities have developed not only writing centres (even for writing in the mother-tongue), but also academic writing classes. Whereas previous student generations seem to have acquired academic reading and writing skills independently (and on the basis of a traditional secondary school education), the "digital natives" seem to need more help. This may also be the case because the rules have become stricter and the genre conventions are more established today in many types of academic communication.

The complexities, functions and features of academic genres have been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Schmied 2015). Although some key concepts are used in all types of academic discourse, we can distinguish between popularisation discourse (e.g. press releases), instructional discourse (e.g. lectures) and research discourse (e.g. PhD theses). The focus of young researchers must be on the research discourses in their PhD theses, conference presentations and journal articles. Journal articles are becoming more and more important and have started replacing PhD theses – a key publication for academic careers. Therefore, the Benin workshop tried to use mentors' instructional discourse to guide young researchers from novice to research discourse that may be accepted by international journals (cf. Fig 1).

3.2. The academic research cycle and its key medium – the research article

The research discourse is fully integrated into what is commonly known an academic research cycle (cf. Fig. 2). We first try to identify a gap in the overall knowledge complex, try to create knowledge, to assure that the quality of the knowledge is good enough for publication, and then in our publication we want to disseminate the knowledge so that other people can develop ideas for further continuing this cycle.

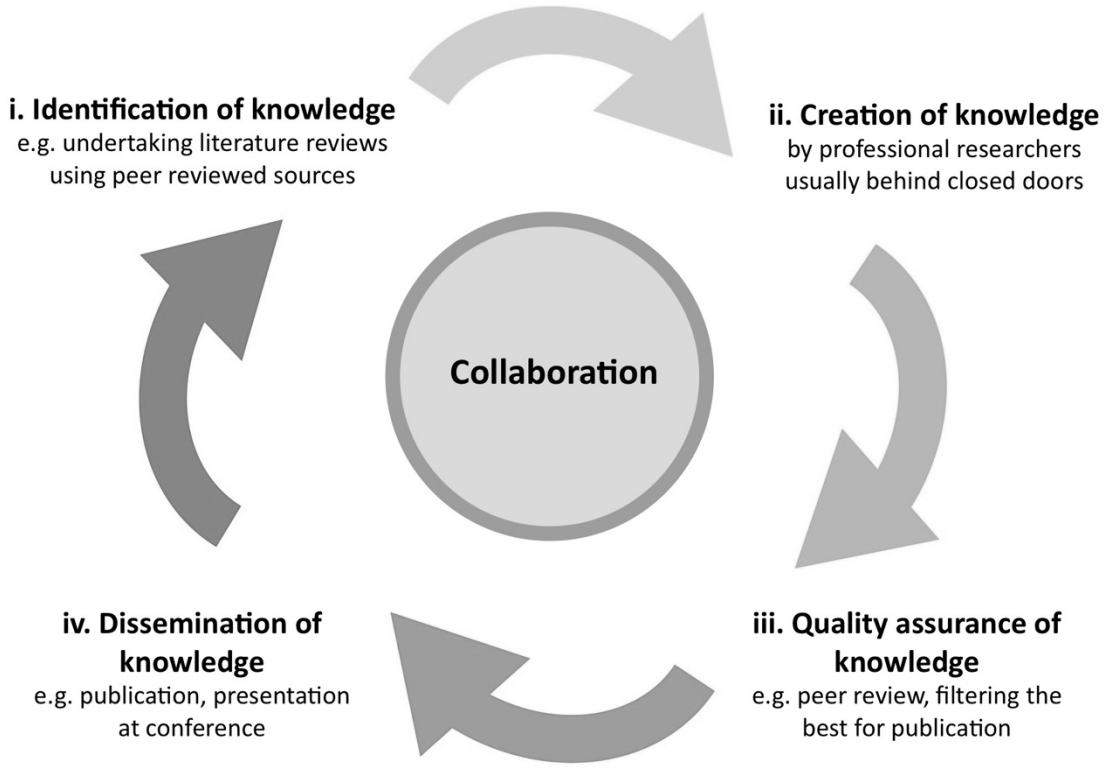


Figure 2: The Academic Research Cycle (Figure taken from Cann, Dimitrou & Hooley 2011: 15).

When we accept a prototype approach to genres and knowledge creation, we can identify the research article today as the central element in the academic research cycle because it ensures the fastest and most reliable dissemination of academic knowledge. Other research outputs, like writing book reviews, writing project proposals or making conference presentations, are also valid, have to be learned, but they are not as decisive for scholars' recognition in the national and international discourses as a research article. Thus, all other academic genres are peripheral (Schmied 2015: 11).

3.3. Academic metadiscourse, metalanguage

The terms metalanguage and metadiscourse, i.e. language about language, are related to the information management or the reader guidance beyond the plain facts, the proposition. We look at the global text management, the argumentation structure, the sequencing of chapters and sections in an academic article, from the top down to paragraphing, and then to the cohesion between the smallest text passages. Academic words and phrases signal the position of a text passage in the global argumentation structure: *define* in the conceptualisation section, *research question* or *hypothesis* in the initial methodology section, but also in the results section, *conclude, limitations* and *further research* towards the end in the conclusion, etc.

This global text management works in a similar manner to the local text management. All these cohesive devices help to produce cognitive coherence in the

mind of the reader, and the writer controls this by giving signposts like *first*, *second*, *third* or *thus* or *because*. Similar cohesive devices can be found on all discourse levels, the micro-level of sentences, the meso-level of paragraphs and the macro-level of sections or chapters. All this contributes to the writer-reader interaction, including the direct form of address, for example. It is always a big question whether or not a writer in an academic context is allowed to use *you* or *we*. This is decided on the basis of the disciplinary conventions and the journal conventions.

Another important point is the writer's commitment to the truth value or reliability of what he/she is saying. Many comparative PhD theses on hedging in different writing contexts (Germany, China, and Africa) are written today and, of course, model auxiliaries or model adverbs are the clear signposts that a writer has to use when he/she wants to say "I think this is correct, but I am not completely offended, if you disagree with me". So *maybe* or *arguably* is chosen by writers to distance themselves from their research but still take their research seriously enough. Occasionally, though this is a little culture-specific, you may use boosters like *certainly* or *in fact* or *this is a fact*. But in academic writing usually we find more hedging than boosting. I cannot go into details here, however, a vast amount of secondary literature on meta-language is available today (e.g. Hyland 2005).

4. Focus on the journal article global paradigm (the macro-level)

4.1. The IMRaD/IMAC global paradigm spreading from Natural Sciences into Humanities

A very common global paradigm is spreading from Natural Sciences into Humanities, and that means into Linguistics and even a little into Cultural Studies and Literary Studies. We have several levels, one of which is called the global vs. local planning, and although there are, naturally, different types of planners, global planners are at an advantage: they can take a global strategy as a skeleton, and thus find it easier to demonstrate that they are good writers. Such writing strategies have been revealed by Swales (1990) in his model of moves and steps, the CARS model, which is an acronym for Creating A Research Space, i.e. to identify a gap to fill in the introduction of a research article. We can expand this model to include the complete text of a journal article.

If we look for a global design model for research articles we immediately come across IMRaD, which stands for Introduction, Methodology, Research, And Discussion. However, I want to modify this slightly to Issue, Methodology, Analysis, and Conclusion (IMAC): instead of Introduction I refer to Issue, or "why is this interesting for the reader?". The Methodology is, of course, a major part and expected chapter heading; it cannot be changed. The Analysis may include a Discussion and Interpretation, and finally the Conclusion can often be extended systematically in several sub-sections. The most interesting aspect about this paradigm is that it can be applied to abstracts as well as (empirical) research articles and BA/MA/PhD theses – and the corresponding general academic lexemes and phrases can be taken over from subject- and culture-specific conventions easily.

4.2. Signposting paradigms: the IMRaD/IMAC structure in the lexicon

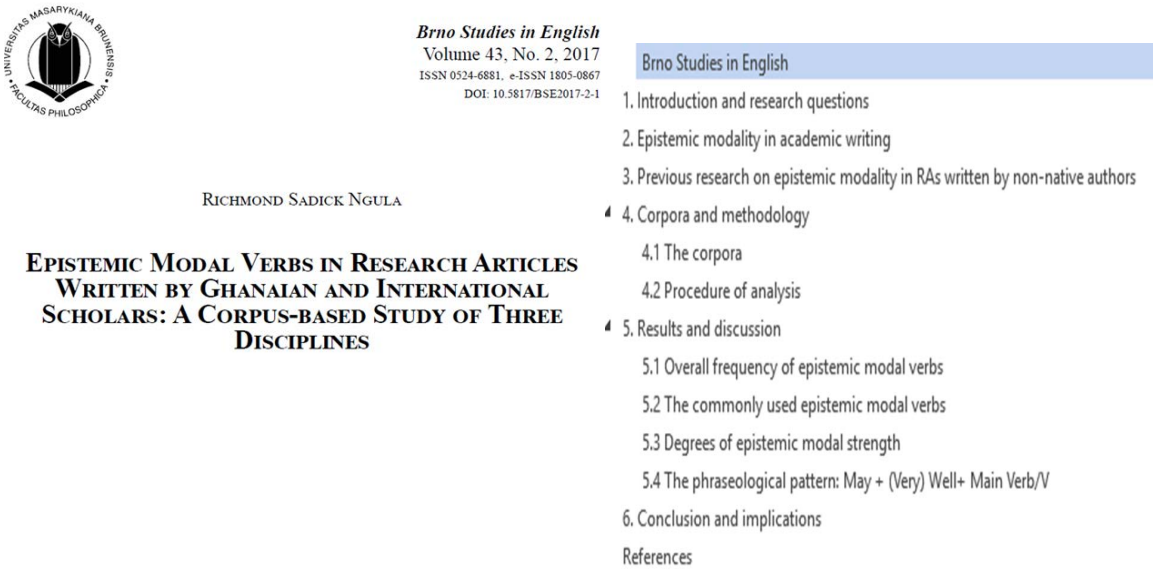
This global paradigm can be signalled, for instance, by standard CARS or Issue phrases like "*not enough* … research on this topic, *yet*". Other such phrases include *it is relevant*, *it is important* "in the academic discourse", or "for practical applications". Or you say "My short article here is *focussed*, it is *data-based*", although the data will be small, and it is *carefully researched*, and the results are *reliable*, of course, it could be "expanded" or "it is just a small contribution" in a wide mosaic in the wide discussion framework that we know from the literature.

The second major section in this paradigm is the Methodology. Sometimes this includes the literature review, including the evaluation of the literature, in a separate section. Then it depends on the topic whether you find "hypotheses" possible, whether you can think of good "research questions". You may want to introduce the database and the procedures or the tests you are going to use before you actually do these tests in the next chapter and analyse your data, and then you can have different types of proof evidence, you can simply state examples if you have a more qualitative approach; if you have a quantitative approach you need statistic tables as summaries. You can also have figures, because they are better illustrations, visualisation; when you find significance in the appropriate significance tests, then the reader is convinced that what you have done for your data should also be the case for other data that are collected in a similar way.

The final sections are in the Conclusion, and this concluding section is often too short in young writers' articles, which is why I am giving you several suggestions here. One possibility is a summary. If you do not have a summary at the end of the analysis, in this case a summary would start with signal words like "in conclusion" or "we have shown" or, if you want to be more tentative, "we hope to have shown". It can also be an interpretation ("This proves that a small study may have major consequences") or what I call contextualization, which often contains phrases like "in a wider perspective", etc. For young researchers it is often advisable that they themselves indicate the limitations of their studies (before others do it), and then say "More data should be collected" and "Similar analyses on a different database could be carried out". "Further research is necessary" is a little elementary, but if you can specify what type of research seems logical after your contribution in the large research mosaic, then that is always a good ending, whether you want to do it yourself or would prefer someone else to continue.

4.3. Paradigm examples from academic journals

Now we look at a few concrete examples of these global paradigms. I have selected articles from journals which are very accessible also from Africa: *Brno Studies in English* is accessible online, open for African scholars. The example has a good, comprehensive title (according to the principles discussed in section 2.6. above) "Epistemic modal verbs in research articles written by Ghanaian and international

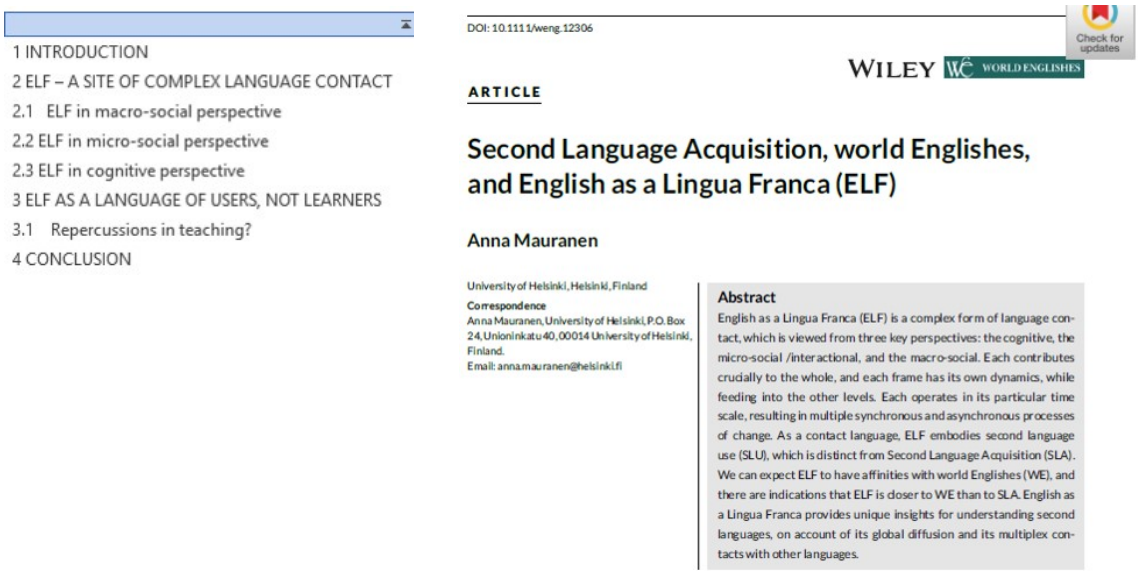

Brno Studies in English
Volume 43, No. 2, 2017
ISSN 0524-6881, e-ISSN 1805-0867
DOI: 10.5817/BSE2017-2-1

Richmond Sadick Ngula

Epistemic Modal Verbs in Research Articles Written by Ghanaian and International Scholars: A Corpus-based Study of Three Disciplines

Brno Studies in English

Figure 3: Journal article with IMRaD structure in *Brno Studies in English*



DOI: 10.1111/weng.12306
WILEY WORLD ENGLISHES
ARTICLE

Second Language Acquisition, world Englishes, and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

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Abstract
English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is a complex form of language contact, which is viewed from three key perspectives: the cognitive, the micro-social /interactional, and the macro-social. Each contributes crucially to the whole, and each frame has its own dynamics, while feeding into the other levels. Each operates in its particular time scale, resulting in multiple synchronous and asynchronous processes of change. As a contact language, ELF embodies second language use (SLU), which is distinct from Second Language Acquisition (SLA). We can expect ELF to have affinities with world Englishes (WE), and there are indications that ELF is closer to WE than to SLA. English as a Lingua Franca provides unique insights for understanding second languages, on account of its global diffusion and its multiplex contacts with other languages.

Figure 4: Journal article with non-IMRaD structure in *World Englishes*

scholars. A corpus-based study of three disciplines" (I have converted the downloaded pdf-file into a doc-format so that you can see the outline in Fig. 3): it has an Introduction and research questions, epistemic modality in academic writing, i.e. key words or key concept explained, the Literature Review, the Methodology with the data-base, a detailed section on Results and Discussion, and a Conclusion with Implications.

The example in Fig. 4 is from a journal called *World Englishes*. With this type of focus it is not too difficult for Africans to publish in this journal, and here is an article not written in this IMRaD structure, because it is a journal article, not necessarily an empirical research article. In this case, it is perfectly justifiable, it is

Outline

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Tables (10)

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Journal of English for Academic Purposes
Volume 8, Issue 2, June 2009, Pages 134-146

Strategic, passionate, but academic: Am I allowed in my writing?

Phan Le Ha

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Abstract

This article is about the struggles to sustain identity as writers while accommodating the demands of the university experienced by Arianto and his thesis supervisor, myself. It shows how critical EAP was the on-going conversation between us about how to negotiate norms, voice and creativity in our writing and in the negotiations Arianto had to make when writing his own essays and thesis in English and assessing his students' written works. The article also discusses how my positioning as a writer of two languages and having a passion for my own voice and identity in writing has influenced the ways I have analysed and interpreted Arianto's tensions, contradictions and justifications in his negotiation processes. The findings showcase the ways in which power is shared and shifted among EAP teachers, supervisors and students and the tendency to recognise and respect different ways of practising EAP among readers, such as journal reviewers and thesis examiners. They also reveal how Arianto's readiness and confidence to share the ownership of and appropriate English as an international language has been exercised in the negotiation processes involving my support, encouragement as well as critical comments and high expectation of his writing.

Figure 5: Journal article with non-IMRaD structure in *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*

even entirely understandable, why this journal article does not have any IMRaD structure.

Another journal that publishes papers relevant to Nigerian young researchers regularly is the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. It publishes articles from and on Africa but also allows Africans a global comparison (Fig. 5). Here I have chosen an example from academic writing that does not follow an IMRaD structure, although it also has a clear and detailed set-up, which could be copied, and the academic discourse continued from another university or country experience.

Nordic Journal of African Studies 26(3): 215–230 (2017)

Language-in-Education Policy in Kenya: Intention, Interpretation, Implementation

Peter Nyakundi MOSE
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Figure 6: Journal article with IMRaD structure in *Nordic Journal of African Studies*

Finally, the *Nordic Journal of African Studies* is, of course, open for contributions from Africa (Fig. 6). Here I have chosen an example from Kenya, language and education policy, which is an issue in many African countries, and you can see that to a global extent, it follows a neat IMRaD/IMAC structure, so language and education in Nigeria or in only parts of Nigeria, in one state, could be an interesting topic for this journal. In this article on Kenya, we have sections on the Purpose of the study, the Methodology with respondents, data collection, data analysis etc. etc. This is a clear structure, which could be copied, and, to some extent, replicated.

5. Editing paragraphs from a global perspective (the meso level)

5.1. An introductory paragraph and opening sentence

The second level in a global perspective is the meso-level, where the argumentative flow within and beyond paragraphs is managed to ensure effective communication. An introductory paragraph in a journal article is maybe not as important as in creative writing, but it provides a context for the argument that expresses your perspective on the issue that you will be dealing with. It can be explicit or implicit to attract the reader to continue reading, and has forward dynamics presenting a coherent development of the topic sentence and involving the reader in this argument. So, the introductory paragraph is crucial to the whole section, and the same applies to the introductory sentence in the paragraph. Such an opening sentence does not depend on the previous title for its understanding, it is a fresh start: it should be uncontroversial, not too provocative and not linked directly to the time of writing. Often it is a more global statement so that the paragraph continues with a *now* in a certain contrast, like “For centuries, increasing meat consumption has

been an indicator of increasing prosperity. But today, a new trend vegan, ...” (Hannay & Mackenzie 2017: 54).

5.2. Climax introduction: thesis statement

The paragraph structure may then be developed over several sentences until finally the thesis statement is the climax of the introduction: it expresses the central concern, it must be recognisable by its paragraph final positioning, and it must be recognisable without any cumbersome signposting. Basically, you should not have to give too many clues that this is important. The final position in the paragraph must make it clear in the paragraph that this is the big point now. It can be rather neutral or suggestive of the line to be followed. So, we would look at that in more detail. And it is formulated in such a way as to end the paragraph in a strong and confident crescendo, so that it sticks in the mind, or at least the short-term memory of the reader. Let me give you two examples (from Hannay & Mackenzie 2017: 59) and state whether this is good or bad:

(1) The thesis to be examined in the following paragraphs is whether grandparents should once again be given a place in the family home.
(2) Any decision to place restrictions on what is broadcast should follow on a careful consideration of the pros and cons of television censorship.

“The thesis to be examined” includes clear signposting and thus is not a good thesis statement. One issue worth consideration is whether it is too clearly signposted and does not indicate by itself that this is the focus, the climax. The second is much better, ending in “television censorship”.

5.3. Structure and linking of paragraphs

The global view on paragraph structures can be clearly seen in Table 1, which shows that the three parts follow each other logically. They do so, because they have different functions and orientation links: the topic sentence links back and the climax sentence forward.

structure	function	orientation link
topic sentence	setting the scene, defining the scope	back to issue or theoretical context
elaboration	developing the argumentation	
climax sentence	stating the point	forward to evidence or references

Table 1: Paragraph structure as the meso-level in a global perspective (adapted from Hannay & Mackenzie 2017: 68)

Thus everything should be linked to the previous text, but ideally also linked to the following text. This similarly means that you cannot have, for instance, one-sentence paragraphs, for instance: sometimes I notice that young scholars have relatively short paragraphs, but the argumentation suggested here means that we need at least three moves in a paragraph, so the paragraph cannot be too short.

This can be seen in the theoretical context of the theme and focus from a functional linguistic point of view, either, from the Prague School or, in Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. You have a theme topic or the background of the presupposition, if you prefer. You have a focus that was called in the Prague School called the rheme, nowadays often refered to as the new or the comment. And the theme may depend on the previous focus of the previous theme. So, all the themes and the focuses can be related. All these cohesions may be signalled explicitly throughout the text by a wide range of cohesive devices that create or construe the text, conjunctions, references, substitution/ellipsis, and lexical cohesion (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 593-658).

A final word of warning is in place here for the 'experienced' writer who has attended academic writing classes, for instance: all explicit cohesion, whether temporal or causal, for instance, has to be supported by the inner logical; just adding causal conjuncts regularly is not enough – if they are not justified and may even be considered overdone or non-native (cf. section 6.2.). So, the advice to academic novices must be to add cohesive devices consciously and systematically, whereas the warning to advanced scholars may be not to do it for its own sake.

5.4. Cohesive devices: linking, connectors, etc., e.g. clause adverbials

A small example for cohesive devices, sometimes called linking, sometimes called connectors, can be illustrated by analysing conjuncts or adverbials in corpora of academic writing (cf. Schmied 2015). I find this interesting, because many students think that *unfortunately* is not used in academic writing, but in a corpus of academic writing, *unfortunately* is quite often used (Fig. 7). This is a clear cohesion and unexpected cohesion marker and the coherence that is built up in your brain here is basically that *unfortunately* means *contrary to expectations*, *contrary to what I have read in the secondary literature and thus expected etc*. You can also see clearly that these "*unfortunatelys*" are often used as a sentence adverbial, that means at the beginning of a sentence and even marked off by a comma. This is thoughtful of the writer to help the reader by putting commas after sentence adverbs or adverbials.

1	It is unfortunately not the case that knowledge of the mechanical	0002AX
2	Unfortunately, an instantaneous comparison was not possible	0003AX1
3	Unfortunately, exact information on gas usage is unavailable	0003AX1
4	Unfortunately, one has no a priori way of predicting	0003AX1
5	Unfortunately, neither easily works.	0003AX1
6	Unfortunately, there are as yet no reliable calculations that	0004AX1
7	Unfortunately our experience is confined to an equilibrium ...	0004AX2
8	Unfortunately, the energy resolution of a neutrino telescope is ...	0015AX
9	... technique to obtain black hole masses which, unfortunately, is unfeasible	0018AX
10	Unfortunately, lack of information about the collective ...	0021AX
11	Unfortunately, the complexity of each subprocess also grows ...	0025AX
12	Unfortunately these theorems tell us practically nothing about ...	0032AX
13	Unfortunately there are very few analytic results available	0040AX
14	Unfortunately, all recent experiments are, in principle,	0043AX
15	Unfortunately, all those exciting recent experiments are	0043AX
16	Unfortunately, those prior art solutions require daunting experiments	0043AX
17	Unfortunately, the NID is uncomputable since the constituent ...	0045AX
18	Unfortunately, in many places such information is getting harder ...	0056NS
19	it's a good protective barrier," says Hildebrand, "unfortunately."	0069NS
20	Unfortunately, because of the rarity of plant data from this ...	0100PN

Figure 7: Usage of *unfortunately* as clause-initial sentence adverbial in academic writing

6. Digesting information and construing meaning at the local level (micro-level)

6.1. Intertextuality and plagiarism

Finally, at the micro-level of our journal article revision, we can discuss the controversial issues of intertextuality and plagiarism. Well before the global availability of the internet, Pennycook (1996) argued that “borrowing others’ words” should not be directly connected to threats or admonitions, as in most Western traditions, as a challenge to the moral foundations on which student-teacher relationships are built. He pleaded for accepting patch-writing “as positive and non-transgressive because it is an attempt on the part of the writer to engage with the linguistic and discursive forms of particular disciplinary fields, as opposed to wholesale coping of entire paragraphs or texts without modification” (Chandrasoma, Thompson & Pennycook 2004: 176). Here copying is actually an important part of learning and not “a crime”.

In this thinking, many cases of such intertextuality can be interpreted as lack of conscious editing or digesting of information in text, which is clearly the work of the writer at the local, the micro-level. At this level, writers have to decide whether excerpts from previous texts are so important in their argumentation that they should be cited literally or whether it is enough to summarise them and integrate them into a new argumentation structure. Intertextuality can then be seen as something positive in a wider academic discourse, which writers use to add more weight to their argumentation (cf. Schmied 2018). This has to be discussed and practiced intensively in writing classes (cf. Buckingham 2016: 128-132), maybe particularly in Africa, where some young scholars seem to think that after changing a few phrases the original passages cannot be found or the reference can be omitted, because it is common knowledge.

6.2. Idiomaticity and transparency

In this local context, issues of idiomaticity and transparency can be discussed. Of course, all technical devices and (internet) resources should be used to check whether language patterns are consistent with regular, unmarked usage in the discourse community. This discourse community today often includes more non-native than native users. Thus, a certain simplicity and transparency may be appropriate, if the writer has the readers' text-processing ability and effectiveness in mind. A nice example of this is structured parallelism (cf. Biber et al. 1991: 897), where even long sentences may become processible more easily when their syntactic embedding is clear.

Finally, we have to consider what Halliday calls the 'discourse flow' (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 114), which goes far beyond the cohesive devices discussed above (in section 5.3.). This is really an argument for practice, practice, practice. It is not the native speaker, it is the conscious diligent editor that produces the best texts in the end, because everyone can develop a feel for academic conventions, but it is a long way from novice to expert – and some guidance may help to make it shorter or less winding.

7. Conclusion: advice to young academics

I would like to conclude by summarising the advice to young academics from Africa again. I have said that writing and in particular editing your own draft is a craft, it can be learned, and it determines the success of academic careers. My main focus is from global to local, at every level macro-, meso- and micro-level, and I would like to emphasize that it is worth bearing these considerations in mind during the entire writing process from first draft to final proof-reading. The global planning is important and it should be helpful to have a sort of skeleton with this IMRaD structure, for instance. If you have a writing block, you fill in parts of the skeleton and hope that your model will be complete at some point. It is important to start from a global perspective, from sections to subsections to paragraph, and then finish diligently the details on the local level: the right words, the right idiomaticity, in particular the prepositions, the standard grammar, in particular definite articles, and also the right punctuation, regular commas, but also reader-friendly colons and semicolons.

Finally, for young scholars it should also be clear that all academic resources like spell, style, and grammar checkers should be used, and the last piece of advice for today is this: it is always worth looking for good research articles in your area of research and interest, and then trying to imitate them in this sense, and enriching them with your own data. Of course, by imitating I do not mean copying without using the options of non-transgressive intertextuality to gain support for our argumentation from (recognised authorities and writers of) older texts. But the sources have to be indicated, and in academic discourse young scholars should not be afraid of stepping in the footsteps of older scholars. If you have your own data, you can always apply the thinking of other people to these new data and produce

your own almost perfect articles. I keep my fingers crossed that you find the right advice to have them published in the end, for the benefit of your academic career.

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