

Academic Writing: an English language hegemony?

Chris Sinclair

Some statistics

- In Europe English language publications tend to outweigh those in the local language; in the Netherlands the ratio is said to be 40:1
- Within SCOPUS the world's largest database of peer-reviewed articles, 80% in English and those in another language must have an abstract in English.
- The world's top 50 journals, based on a citation index (the frequency of citations their articles received) are in English.

Some statistics

- 2011 Royal Society report suggested the following rank order of countries producing the most English language articles: US, China, the UK, Germany, Japan, France, and Canada. China may soon overtake the US.
- Between 2001 and 2011, the number of English language publications from China in peer-reviewed journals went up from 3% to 11% of total world output.

Why is this happening?

- Globalisation
- Dissemination of research findings
- International research collaboration
- A metric for researcher/university ranking
- Increased citations
- Peer review (most English language publications)

A debated issue – pros and cons

- Accessibility of research and data
- Dissemination of knowledge
- Time, effort and cost to write in English
- Perceived bias against non-native authors
- Lack of diversity – in subject matter of research, in methodologies, even perhaps in ways of thinking

Tension between English and L1

Tension between the pressure to publish in English, especially in high impact publications on the one hand, and in journals in the local language on the other.

Publishing in English encouraged by institutions focused on international rankings; also be motivated by promotion for the individual author. Conversely, publishing in the local language is necessary to reach local audiences or to influence local public opinion or policy-making.

Regional and disciplinary differences

- In the Arab world it's been reported that the main dilemma faced by social scientists is to publish globally and perish locally versus to publish locally and perish globally.
- The pre-dominance of English is less marked in Social Sciences and Humanities than in STEM subjects
- Traditional Chinese Medicine for example is virtually impossible to write about in English as the terminology and concepts simply don't exist in English.

An advantage for native speakers?

- No doubt; but academic writing is a skill that has to be acquired even by native speakers.
- Much research has demonstrated the wide variation between disciplinary discourses.
- Recent article by Ken Hyland suggesting that linguistic bias against NNES authors is a myth.

Feedback on 2015 Writing for Publication course

Scope of feedback

Three aspects to articles:

- Content – most important (and I can't comment)
- Structure and organization – I can comment but risk interfering with or changing the content; difficult to do without face-to-face discussion
- Use of language

Tense

In abstracts and introduction sections it's typical to use the present tense to describe the general nature of the research.

The effect of xxx is studied in this paper..

The model of xxx is analysed..

Xxx is found to result in...

The characteristics of xxx are described...

In this study xxx is investigated..

Our work presents a model of...

This paper demonstrates..

Tense

But, even in introductions, a description of the methodology used will usually be in simple past:

Methods of xxx were used for...

In order to investigate xxx we conducted...

When referring to a later point in the text we typically use present tense or 'will' future

Xxx are described in detail below...

Xxx will be discussed in section 3...

Tense

Either simple past or present perfect is typically used to describe research carried out by others:

.. xxx examined the reasons for.. ..xxx has examined the reasons for..

Although the present simple is also possible:

In their 2012 article Smith et al discuss the question of...

Tense

The simple present is typically used when referring to things or states that are generally true:

The distinctive features of xxx remain unexplained.

Be consistent in the use of tense:

*As a result, when the electron beam **was** turned on a significant increase in the intensity of hydrogen release **is** observed.*

it and this

- *It may be due to*
- *It means, when choosing among*
- *It proves inconsistency of*
- *It is also leads to*
- *It led to a certain situation*
- *It helps to reduce industry costs*
- *It results in additional*

Grammatical agreement

- *many research.. (researches??)*
- *..a components of the xxx are presented.*
- *The positions of the cathode assemblies is...*

Prepositions

- ~~..at~~ *during?* *the elastic waves propagation*
- *..approaches of* *to the problem...*
- *.. investigation on* *of/into*

Allow, permit, enable, facilitate

(allow 31 permit 2 enable 4 facilitate 1)

allows + noun or pronoun

(**not** a gerund form *..allows detecting of... allows identifying..*
or infinitive form *..they allow to influence..*)

..allows detection of.. allows identification of.. allows use of..

OR

..allows us to identify..

Colloquial usage

- *obviously*
- *speaking about it, we note that*
- *for another thing*
- *That's why the heat transfer basic laws*
- *on top of that..*
- *besides*

Paragraphing:

Typically, a paragraph consists of several sentences which focus on particular idea or theme; a new paragraph generally suggests that a new idea or theme is being introduced; be careful not start a new paragraph where it's not needed:

As an example we will take one of the most successful enterprises in Russia that has had the opportunity to invest in CSR.

AutoVAZ is one of the largest car manufactures in Europe. It publishes annual reports where it provides general CSR information [4–6].

The major focus of AutoVAZ CSR project is personnel.....

Typical collocations:

- Conduct + experiments
- Solve + problem
- Ask/answer address discuss + question
- Address/discuss + issue

Plurals in nous phrases:

- *..metal nitrides thin films*
- *..properties degradation of such materials..*
- *..compression and tension stresses changes in the elements of..*

Thank you

C.Sinclair@soton.ac.uk