○ **J. BITCHENER,** *WRITING AN APPLIED LINGUISTICS THESIS OR DISSERTATION: A GUIDE TO PRESENTING EMPIRICAL RESEARCH*

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Writing a thesis is a difficult task for most students. For many, it is their first experience. There are generally two kinds of resources that students can turn to in carrying out this task: those focusing on the research process or methodology (e.g. how to find a topic or how to conduct an interview), and those focusing on the writing up of the thesis. Most write-up books focus on referencing, and they tend to be generic. Some examine certain features in the writing such as stance, but few give an explicit description of the structure of each chapter or section. In responding to this need, Bitchener's *Writing an Applied Linguistics Thesis or Dissertation: A Guide to Presenting Empirical Research* is a timely addition to the resources that are much needed by thesis writers.

In evaluating any new book on thesis writing, one cannot help comparing it with Swales and Feak's (2004) seminal book *Academic Writing for Graduate Students – Essential Tasks and Skills*, which has been widely used in English for Academic Purposes programs in universities. In this and their 2000 book, *English in Today's Research World: A Writing Guide,* Swales and Feak attempt to provide a generic guide for academic writing in general and thesis writing in particular. Yet, as we now know, theses vary greatly from one discipline to another, not only in content but also in structure. A manual or handbook which tries to cover all disciplines – such as those by Swales and Feak or Weissberg and Buker's (1990) book on writing a thesis in natural sciences and Becker's (2007) book on writing in social sciences – will not be able to deal with the topic adequately since even general disciplines within a broad field can have very different ways of writing. Bitchener's book with its focus on one specific discipline – applied linguistics – has therefore nicely filled this gap.

The book consists of eight chapters: a background chapter and seven chapters on the typical chapters of a thesis: Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion of Results, and Conclusion. Except for the background chapter, the structures of the chapters are very similar to each other, i.e. the author describes the functions, content and

structure of the part-genre (i.e. section or chapter of the thesis such as Abstract or Introduction), and analyses its key linguistic features. Using Swales' (1990) genre analysis approach, Bitchener analyses and presents the moves and sub-moves in each part-genre. Although the same organization in each chapter might be seen as monotonous, this is in fact an advantage of the book, as the presentation is very straightforward. This way the reader can quickly refer to the section they are interested in and easily compare the structures or linguistic features of different part-genres.

What I personally like about the book is that it is not prescriptive, as the author emphasizes again and again (e.g. p.180); but rather it lets the readers explore the possibilities by themselves. The author always tries to encourage the reader (in this case, the postgraduate student) to identify the moves and sub-moves in the sample text based on the options given before reading his own analysis. As rightly pointed out by the author, in doing this the reader 'will be in a better position to understand and respond to the analysis that follows' (p.12). If students can develop such analytic skills, they will be able to apply them to the analysis of move structures of theses in their own discipline. Thus, this book can be used by not only those who are writing a thesis in applied linguistics but also by those in other disciplines. Thesis writers will also find the "Frequently Asked Questions" at the end of each chapter very helpful as they address the important questions that students may have in their mind when they come to write a certain chapter of the thesis. The list of moves and sub-moves in the appendix also provides a useful reference guide for the reader.

In addition, I find the section 'Determining thematic/topic units" (p.62) for the literature review chapter useful. In this section Bitchener shows thesis writers how they can 'keep a record/summary of relevant literature' (p.62), how they can 'develop a mind-map of key themes/topics' (p.63), and how to create a 'table of contents outline' (p.65) before they start to write up the literature review chapter. It can thus be seen that Bitchener does not only focus on the product itself, but also the process (i.e. how to write the sub-sections of the literature review). This is important as the content of sub-sections will vary greatly from one thesis to another.

Bitchener's book, however, is not without drawbacks. Firstly, all the examples in the book are drawn from a single Masters thesis, except for the illustrations for the abstract, which are based on the abstracts of a Masters thesis and a PhD thesis. It is doubtful that one thesis has all or most of the moves and sub-moves that are possible. Also, the moves or linguistic features used in the sample text may reflect a unique writing style. Secondly, it would be useful to have more extensive comments on the sequence of moves and sub-moves in the thesis. The reader may wonder whether, for example, they should first 'provide context,

background of the research' (Move 1a) or 'identify the motivation for the research' (Move 1b) (p.11). Such information however could only be obtained were the book based on a much larger corpus. There are also some inaccuracies here and there in the book; for instance, the author mentions the use of present perfect and present simple in Move 2 of the Introduction chapter (p.50), but the example provided shows the use of present perfect and past simple. This can be somewhat misleading. Likewise, on the next page (p.51) the author writes 'However, in sentence 23, she has used the *present perfect tense*', but this tense is nowhere to be found in the example; the only tense illustrated there is the past simple: "perceived" and "were explored" (p.51). Such typos should be corrected to avoid misleading the reader, who in most cases is inexperienced or may not have a strong linguistic background.

That said, these minor weaknesses do not make the book any less valuable. It does offer a very detailed move structure of the whole thesis. The exercises devised by the author throughout the book are particularly suitable for classroom use or for self-study. *Writing an Applied Linguistics Thesis or Dissertation* can therefore be used as a resource for academic writing or thesis writing courses or workshops at universities. It can also be used as a reference book for supervisors and students who need to write a thesis in applied linguistics or, more generally, an empirically based thesis. Supervisors and academic advisers can confidently recommend this book to their students.

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