

REVIEWS

Woodrow, Lindy (2014). *Writing about Quantitative Research in Applied Linguistics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 200 pp.

Writing about Quantitative Research in Applied Linguistics obviously combines, as the title suggests, approaches in academic writing with quantitative research methodologies – a timely book for young academic researchers at European universities.

The concise *Introduction* (p. 1-8) provides general characteristics of writing about quantitative research with the focus on *Review of the literature*, *Writing about research rationale* and *Writing about research methods*. These principles are illustrated further in Section 1.3 on *Common texts about quantitative research*, which cover research assignments, research proposals, unpublished theses and dissertations, unpublished research reports, published journal articles, and books and books' sections, in each of which the author gives a brief introduction and the specific features of purpose, audience, expectations, and norms and conventions. Section 1.4 on *Disseminating research* covers conference proceedings, book chapters, books and monographs, and journal articles. This introduction is then elaborated in the following three parts:

Part 1 discusses *General Considerations in Writing about Quantitative Research* (p. 11-60) such as the steps usually followed in quantitative research projects (purpose, research questions/hypotheses, variables, measurements, analyses, data collections, data analyses and writing, on p. 12), all provided with very nice illustrative examples. The section on reliability, validity and ethics is interesting, also because it contains a list of shortcomings in writings in these areas as well as guidelines for writing. The special section on writing about participants has longer illustrative examples. The section called *Presenting descriptive statistics* must obviously have a wealth of examples, including some from Woodrow's own writings, i.e. her PhD thesis and related articles from 2006.

Part 2 *Writing about Specific Statistical Procedures* (p. 63-145) covers *T*-tests, again with shortcomings and guidelines, again with shortcomings and guidelines, ANOVA, ANCOVA and MANOVA, again with shortcomings and guidelines, regression, correlation and factor analysis. The section about structural equation modelling is probably more unusual and makes this textbook different from many others (e.g. Rasinger 2013). The section titled *Writing about non-parametric tests* covers a wide range of tests going far beyond the well-known chi square.

Part 3 *Publishing Quantitative Research in Applied Linguistics* (p. 149-188) discusses in detail journal articles, book chapters and books. It ends conveniently with the comparison of the three most frequently used academic styles, American Psychological Association (APA style), Modern Language Association (MLA style) and Chicago style, which are all convincingly illustrated in citations, secondary citations, reference lists, headings and tables.

The book has some special features which will be welcomed by all novices to quantitative research, e.g. a glossary of key terms at the beginning (p. viii-xx) and *Useful Resources for Conducting and Writing Quantitative Research in Applied Linguistics* (p. 198-190), which range from analytical tools to journal recommendations. Three examples from the glossary illustrate the wide scope and non-technical style of the section: “Chi-squared: This refers to statistical analysis. There are two types: the goodness-to-fit chi-squared test and the chi-squared test for independence. The goodness-to-fit chi-squared test is used to compare expected and actual outcomes. The chi-squared test for independence explores the relationship between two categorical variables” (p. xiii). “IELTS: The International English Language Testing Service test is a high-impact test widely used to assess English proficiency for university entry” (p. xiv). “Digital Object Identifier: This is the unique alpha-numeric code given to a document that does not change over time. Most publications have these; some publications and thesis examiners insist on an author providing these” (p. xiv) [because this allows the reader to check references quickly]. Of course, this section would have been even more independent if the pages numbers of main explanations would have been added directly, especially since not all key terms are listed in the index. Some explanations in this glossary are also more controversial than it may appear. Thus “ISI: This is an acronym for the Institute of Science Index. Journals that are included in this list are highly regarded” (p. xvi) does not mention that ISI is part of the Intellectual Property & Science Business of Thomson Reuters, as Wikipedia (08/06/15) reports, and not an independent science institution, as it may sound. The “ISI Highly Cited” lists are calculated in every one of its 21 fields, but humanities and applied linguistics are only included in the “Social Sciences General” field and thus ISI is not really relevant in applied linguistic disciplines. However, to be fair, a list of key terms cannot include such critical perspectives – and a simple introduction to writing either. The tendency to view things rather as facts than as conventions is noticeable throughout the book, despite the focus on ‘conventions’ in the introduction mentioned above.

The strengths of the slim volume lie in other features: The practical usefulness of the book for beginners is evident from the three-page list of examples and the

convenient, however relatively short, index. The most convincing features of the book are the systematic juxtaposition of common shortcomings and guidelines in Part 2. Wherever possible, each section starts with an introduction with a list of sections and ‘technical information’ (mainly definitions), then the *Writing about ...* section with detailed examples from different research genres and ends with a summary, *Questions to consider*, a short list of *Further reading* and *Sources of examples*.

My favourite explanation is on Ethics:

Research needs to be carried out in an ethical manner which does not have a negative effect on the participants in any way. While research in applied linguistics can rarely be classified as dangerous to participants, it is important for the integrity of the research findings to ensure that the participants are representative of the sample. This means that they were not persuaded or pressed to take part in the research. Some governments and universities demand that researchers go through a formal procedure and make an ethics application which is then approved by a committee. ... Research ethics must be referred to in a graduate text. With journal articles, it is increasingly necessary to refer to or to acknowledge that ethical procedures have been followed as was discussed above. (p. 27ff)

This is an important modern argumentation and it is rightly linked to the corresponding TESOL webpages. It is not surprising that in this context the current issues of plagiarism and even self-plagiarism are at least briefly mentioned as well (p. 33ff).

The book under review is unique in that it focuses on the writing part of quantitative research, thus it goes far beyond the well-known textbooks in the field that focus on statistics and methodology alone, such as Rasinger (2013) and Paltridge and Phaki (2010). It includes many features from the well-known writing manuals, which also contain appropriate academic phrases and idiomatic conventions, nowadays from a corpus-linguistic database. The internationally acclaimed volume by Swales and Feak (2012), for instance, has a unit *Data commentary*, which lists ‘dangers’ like “to simply repeat in words what the data has expressed in non-verbal form” (p. 139) or phrases like “Table 5 shows ...”, “Figure 1 plots ...” (p. 147) and meta-language information like “in some published texts, the percentage of passive verbs has been found to be as high as 25 percent” (p. 147). Interestingly, the whole concept of *meta-discourse* or *meta-language* or the related *genre* and *discourse community* discussion does not figure prominently in the Woodrow’s book and none of these key words is listed in the index.

Although Woodrow does not include these empirical practical meta-discourse elements, this relatively concise volume can really be recommended as one textbook to students in research seminars and colloquia, because it covers a wide range of quantitative methods and appropriate examples from applied linguistics. Its general design makes it very accessible to students who have to try their first steps in academic research and writing and would like to know where all this may lead if they wanted to establish themselves in today's research world.

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References

- Paltridge, B. and Pahkiti, A. (2010) (eds) *Continuum Companion to Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. London: Continuum.
- Rasinger, S. M. (2013) *Quantitative Research in Linguistics. An Introduction*. 2nd ed. London: Bloomsbury.
- Swales, J. M. and Feak, C. B. (2012) *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills*. 3rd ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.