



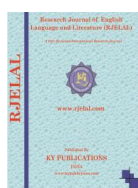
## THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN RESEARCH WRITING

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### Abstract

When the field work is complete, the notes or notes cards and the sources are checked and updated, then comes the time to write the research paper according to how the contents are organized. The language use in research writing should be simple, precise, and clear. The writer planned the sentences and paragraphs properly with concrete and specific words. Therefore, there are certain words and phrases that the researchers have to avoid in research writing; such as, personal language, figures of speech, proverbs, idioms, sweeping statements, words and phrases which can be understood only by a particular group of people or those which belong to one culture, malapropism, and any indirect expressions of a language which are not easy to understand and likely to muddled up the readers. The purpose of this article is how to use language in research papers. We as researchers need to write using concise language, interesting and coherent paragraphs, appropriate connectives, and suitable introductory phrases before quotations. Therefore, the language of research writing includes a careful use of words, sentences, and paragraphs with proper care of coherence and use of transitions.

Keywords: Standard language, Inclusive, Concise, Coherence, Transitions, Quotations

### Introduction

The aim of this article is to remind researchers to be careful with the words that they use in research writing. There are certain language expressions which we as researcher have to avoid and some expressions or phrases which we need to use for the smooth reading and to be more reader friendly. As much as possible we should strive for the right choice of words that are clear and specific.

### Impersonal Language

Impersonal language helps in minimizing the first person singular words; such as, *I*, *me*, and *my*. Even in the main introduction and conclusion,

these personalize words are not encouraged. The reason is that, the emphasis should be on the research work, not on the writer. We often use the third person, "the researcher" so that we can avoid the personal pronoun 'I'. Some researchers use the plural form 'we' for the lack of a proper form. However, these are not desirable; perhaps, wherever practicable it is better to use passive voice (such as, the data were collected for period of seven months) in order to avoid using the first person personal pronoun. At the same time we must keep in mind that too many passive sentences can make the writing heavy and dull. Therefore, we should use active voice as frequently as possible to make our

writing direct, alive, and natural (such as, the data revealed that... or Crystal (2008) opines that ...).

### Words to be Avoided

The following words and sayings are to be avoided though they might sound tantalizing but they can be misleading the readers.

Fancy words: fancy words should not be used in a research paper; for instance, one of the informants was filled with the *euphoria* of listening to his own voice after the recording, that he asked the researcher to play the recording two times.

Figures of speech: figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, and ironies are to be avoided, because they mean different meaning to different readers. Metaphors can distract attention and at times can sound strained or too much force. In short, figurative language can create confusion to the readers, they are indirect and unclear.

Contracted forms: the forms contracted with the negative, be verbs, and modals are to be avoided in writing research. For example, couldn't, wasn't, mustn't, that's, they're, they'll are not advise to use in any formal writing.

Superlatives: expressions in general such as the best, the worst, the largest, the smallest, the riches, most interesting, etc. should be avoided.

Sweeping forms- the language and language use in research is 'modest' and 'tentative'. Therefore, words such as: everyone, everybody, all, nobody, none and any dogmatic forms are to be avoided. Instead use: some, often, most. Sometimes we have evidence of what we write/state yet, we have to be careful of how we state our case; it is better not to overstate (vyhmeister, 2001, 92).

Idioms: idiomatic expressions can create misunderstanding and confuse the readers. Therefore it is better to avoid them in formal writing, particularly in research writing; though idioms do have some positive effects; for instance, a writer who can use idioms shows that he is comfortable and familiar with the language. Furthermore, they add imagery and make the writing more memorable. In a sentence, "It is time for him to taste his own medicine." is easily remembered because readers

can relate to the displeasure of taking a bitter medicine. However, idioms are not used in research they are used in stories. Idioms do have disadvantages for some readers who are not familiar with speaking indirectly; they might take it in a literal sense or will not understand it at all ([www.Enago.com](http://www.Enago.com)).

Malapropisms: as pointed out at the beginning in the introduction that the language used in research writing should be simple, precise, and clear; great care should be taken not to commit malapropism. Malapropism is when writers sometimes happen to make mistake with words having similar sounds; but their meanings are completely different from each other. Words like suffocated and sophisticated; obtuse and abstruse; unanimous and anonymous; comprehend, apprehend, and reprehend and so on. Here are some common malapropisms which often crop up in students' research and project writing; words such as 'there' and 'their'; 'than' and 'then'; 'college' and 'collage'. Similar sounds and sometimes same sounds, but they are entirely different in meaning. Therefore, care should be taken to avoid malapropism in research writing.

Exclamation marks: punctuation marks are important when used carefully and efficiently, sentences should be properly punctuated in order to convey the message intended. But exclamation marks should be avoided they do not fit or they are not relevant in research writing.

Sayings and expressions: sayings and expressions which belong to a particular place, state, and culture should not be used. Vyhmeister (2001) opines that sermonic language or pulpit language is not research language. For instance, "soul won to the truth" is not easily understood to the general public readers; therefore, it is better to write "people baptized into the church" (p. 92). Moreover, concrete words are easy to understand. Baker (1973) asserts that the rule for good writing style is to be as concrete as we can. This requires effort because words are not objects or things. Words represent our ideas of what we think of things (pp. 81-82).

Similarly, a state language is not a research language. The reason is that there are some lexical items which can be understood only within a state. For instance, "Lanketing which means visiting Lanka, a shopping center near Banaras University". The word "outbooks" is commonly used in West Bengal for books that are not in the prescribed syllabus, but they are not known to the rest of the people/states in India (Mehrotra, 1982, p. 168). In South Africa the word 'robot' is used for a 'traffic light' which even Dr. D. Crystal, a British, renowned writer, and world authority on the English language could not understand when he saw the writing on the signboard, "turn left at the robot" for the first time. Therefore, in research writing a standard language should be used.

#### Standard Language

Language use in writing research should be a standard language. Language has many levels, for instance, formal, common, standard, colloquial, slang etc. Vyhmeister (2001) points out that, 'crazy' is colloquial, 'nuts' is slang, 'deranged' is too formal, but 'irrational' is a standard word. Standard language is the variety of version which is used by most of the people in a community and it is accepted as the official language of a country. It is the English language of printed books, newspapers, and mass media. It is associated with education institutions, administrative work, and broadcasting. And it is more connected with writing (eg. in the use of morphology, syntax, and grammar) rather than speaking (Yule, 2008, pp. 194-195, & Yule, 2019, p. 269). There are many different standard Englishes as well; for example, American Standard English, British Standard English, Australian Standard English, Indian Standard English, and so on.

#### Inclusive Language

Inclusive language is a language that deals with words which refer to gender issues. In research writing, researchers must pay attention to these gender words and expressions such as, he/she and his/her. Excessive use of "he or she" and "he/she" as in 'He/she answered all the questions'. Instead of "he or she" or "he/she" we can write forms which include both the genders. For instance, 'The informants answered all the questions'. The singular

"he" and "she" can also be replaced by the plural form "they". It is good to keep in mind that "Excellent writing takes time and effort. Mediocre writing is faster and easier. However, it does not usually merit the professor's approval, a reader's interest, or your own satisfaction" (Vyhmeister, 2001, p. 93).

The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) suggests that some writers consider the masculine pronoun 'he' to be a careless writing when it is referring to both male and female. Using "he or she" and "he/she" if repetitive can become quite boring and annoying. "Combination, forms such as *he/she* or *(s)he* are awkward and distracting" (pp. 66-67). There are quite a number of ways of solving this problem of 'he' and 'she'; for instance, by using plural forms for nouns and pronouns such as from 'A *teacher* who has a soft voice need to learn to project *his* voice to become audible to the students' to '*Teachers* who have soft voice need to learn to project *their* voice to become audible to the students'. Next, the pronoun can be replaced with an article, like from 'A researcher can apply for *his* extension by July 15' to 'A researcher can apply for *the* extension by July 15' (ibid).

#### Concise Language

We should choose words which are as concise as possible because the success of research writing depends a lot on the language we use. Perrin (2007) APA Style suggests that we should not leave it to the readers to decide and deduce meanings from a vague use of language. Furthermore, instead of writing that the survey has several questions, it is better to be specific and clearly mention that it has fifty-five questions. And instead of writing that the study is based on the sample of many speakers or a large number of informants, it is clearer to be precise by stating exactly, for instance, 400 respondents comprises of fifty teachers; fifty students; fifty shopkeepers; fifty doctors; fifty lawyers; fifty musicians, fifty dancers, fifty businessmen. And clearly explain the number of males and females, education, age, and locations such as rural and urban areas according to the needs and purposes of the study or better still is to show it in a Table.

Adverbs and adjectives such as marvelously, marvelous, wonderful, awful, awesome, and great do not give a clear picture; they are somewhat vague. For instance, 'He has a marvelous accent!' is not very clear. Perhaps it is better and clearer to say, 'He speaks loud and clear, every syllable is well pronounced'.

Common nouns for example, 'man' can refer to all human beings and 'plant' refers to all kinds of plants are general nouns; hence, they do not give clear picture. To be more precise, specific words may be used. For instance, we can use scholar, research scholar, gentleman, youth, or children.

Verb forms such as 'go, walk' and 'say' are not only too common but also do not show action or describe much. We should use perhaps forms like advance, depart, ride, stroll, saunter, wander, ramble, dawdle...and talk, speak, voice, utter, and express; keeping in mind to use the right collocation. To find the right word we can refer to a dictionary, Roget's Thesaurus, Longman Essential Activator, and Oxford collocation.

The use of concise language is the key to good, clear, and successful writing. However, occasionally, when there is a lack of exact terms, then we have to use words as a method of operation such as the word 'borrowing' when a word is borrowed from another language. Another term researchers often use as a mode of operation is 'questionnaire' which according to Dornyei (2007) is not accurate because many questionnaires contain sentences which do not end with question marks. These terms- 'borrowing' and 'questionnaire' are modus operandi in nature but though they are not concise, researchers can use them, since there are no other better words to use.

### **Paragraph Length**

A paragraph should contain only one idea. Therefore, the length of the paragraph is determined by the matter that has to be explained about the idea. Vyhmeister (2001) points out that as a rule of thumb, if a paragraph fills one computer screen or more, then, that is too long. Short paragraphs are better than long ones; approximately between six to eight sentences so

that it will be easy to read and understand. But a paragraph should not be too short either; one sentence or two short sentences cannot be a paragraph for the reason that it may not be able to communicate the idea to satisfy the readers.

### **Paragraph Unity**

A well planned paragraph has unity and all the sentences are in harmony. A useful device that helps paragraphs to have unity is to pay attention to a topic sentence which is the main thought for the paragraph. The rest of the sentences are connected to that thought. This will prevent from the inclusion of unnecessary words and ideas in the paragraph which do not belong to the topic sentence and also from the splitting of an idea to the other paragraphs.

### **Coherence**

Coherence in the paragraphs refers to the order in which the information is organised and written in a clear and logical connection from one sentence to the other or from one paragraph to the other while developing ideas. If the information is not properly arranged in order from one point to the next, and if a link is broken, it may lead the reader to a state of confusion.

### **Transitions**

Transitional words can be of great help in connecting sentences, ideas, and paragraphs from one to the next. They can also improve the research writing style. Transitions such as the following words and phrases can make the reading smooth and easy; but, researchers must make sure that they choose and use what suits their writing well. Some examples of transitions:

*also; besides; accordingly; in addition next; likewise; furthermore; on the contrary; thus; ; further; meanwhile; on the other hand; then ;therefore; as a result ; at the same time; but; however ; similarly; in conclusion; again; moreover; consequently; finally*

Here is a sample paragraph with transitions:

*"To sum up, words and phrases such as these can be used effectively to smooth transitions and thus make for easier reading. However, make sure you are certain what the word*

means and choose the one that best fits your writing. *Finally*, use a variety of these transition words” (Vyhmeister, 2001, p. 96).

### Introducing Quotations

Quotations are very important words and lines we use in our research writing from other writers to heighten and strengthen our argument. The quotations should not come as a surprise and shock the readers. We can use the following verbs that will help us to introduce quotations:

asserts	believes	describes	mentions
agrees	confirms	explains	opposes
expresses	indicates	points out	implies
defends	proposes	opines	remarks
recommends	reveals	states	suggests
verifies	argues	declares	rejects
affirms	claims	refutes	shows

Turabian (2019) has given some tips regarding what punctuation marks to use while introducing quotations; they are as follows:

“If the introduction to a quotation is a complete sentence, put a period or a colon after it. If it is a phrase or incomplete clause, put a comma. If it is a clause ending in *that*, use no punctuation.”

Sentence- “Posner focuses on religion for its social functions. ‘A notable feature...’ ”

Sentence- “Posner focuses on religion: ‘A notable feature...’ ”

Incomplete clause- “Posner says, ‘a notable feature...’ ”

Word ending clause is *that*- “Posner says that ‘a notable feature...’ ” (p. 271).

When we researchers quote or refer the readers to someone’s writing, we should be careful what tense to use. We can use past as well as present, depending on the item we are referring to. When referring to past events, use past tense; such as, Gumperz (1982) ordered, “keep straight, sidha jao” (p. 91). The past tense ‘ordered’ is preferred here because it refers to the past event that

happened in the past. On the other hand, when referring to views and beliefs whether present or past authors, the present tense should be used. For instance, Poplack (1980) opines that the theory of Free Morpheme Constraint and Equivalence Constraint are universally applicable. Gardener-Chlorus (2009) argues that linguistic constraints should “be seen as having a relative rather than a universal value” (p. 96). Teitelbaum (2003) also approves that the present tense should be used “in stating universal truths... for instance, ... Hamlet is one of the greatest plays” (p. 39). Hacker, & Sommers (2012) emphasize to use present tense “to discuss the results of an experiment (the results show)” (p.172). One more important point to remember is to see that a quotation fits in smoothly into our writing and of course we should be careful and faithful to declare the source.

### Conclusion

We have discussed in this article some of the general principles that can facilitate clear communication and some suggestions to improve the language of research writing. It is quite clear that the credibility of a research work depends much on the language that we use. Therefore, we should take time to choose our words. Words which are as effective as possible to be able to get across to the readers what we have in mind. Choose words which bring out clear meaning. To achieve success in writing, usually, it takes drafts after drafts before we come to the final draft. Good research writing is difficult; it takes a lot of time, but when it is done well, it becomes a high quality and it is rewarding. It is a great accomplishment to be able to communicate our ideas, thoughts, and feelings with other people.

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