Writing Science When English is Your Second Language

Larenda Mielke

English Language Programs

Washington University in St. Louis

Annual Conference on EFFECTIVE RESEARCH MANAGEMENT
Proposing, Performing, and Managing Successful Research Projects

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This presentation focuses on three aspects of research writing for non-native speakers:

- **Current Research**
- **Common Problems**
- **Practical Exercises**
First, current research shows that culture affects research in many ways, including writing.

Let’s do some research on this audience.

No, not them – YOU!
Which countries have the most women in leadership positions?

- Finland – 42% in parliament, 60% in government
- Sweden – 48% in parliament, 41% in government
- Norway – 38% in parliament, 45% in government
- Holland – 37% in parliament, 31% in government
- Britain – 20% in parliament, 22% in government
- U.S. – 16% in the House, 15% in government
Masculinity vs. Femininity

Hofstede’s study suggested that men’s goals were significantly different from women’s goals and could therefore be expressed on a masculine and a feminine pole.

Where feminine values are more important (Sweden, France, Israel, Denmark, Indonesia), people tend to value a good working relationship with their supervisors; working with people who cooperate well with one another, living in an area desirable to themselves and to their families, and having the security that they will be able to work for their company as long as they want.

Where the masculine index is high (US, Japan, Mexico, Hong Kong, Italy, Great Britain), people tend to value having a high opportunity for earnings, getting the recognition they deserve when doing a good job, having an opportunity for advancement to a higher-level job, and having challenging work to do to derive a sense of accomplishment.

What are some other ways to assess dimensions of national cultures?

Geert Hofstede – country comparison

Geert Hofstede – another country comparison

How do researchers communicate across cultures?

Lrenda’s email
So how do cultural differences affect writing?

Dr. Richard Nisbett, a cultural psychologist, has done some controversial research comparing Eastern and Western thought.
Some of Nisbett’s points may affect research writing:

Parts vs. whole
Nisbett also shows how Easterners group items differently.

Cow, grass, and chicken

Categories or relationships?
Lastly, which cultures thrive on debate?
Second, non-native speakers of English make some common grammar mistakes which must be addressed.

**Use of the definite article**

“the”

**Encouraging self-correction**

**Self-Editing Form**
Third, some practical exercises can clarify non-native speakers’ writing. (These exercises are helpful for native speakers too!)

From “The Science of Scientific Writing” by George D. Gopen and Judith A. Swan
To summarize this third main point:

1. Follow a grammatical subject as soon as possible with its verb.
2. Place “new information” to be emphasized in the stress position.
3. Make sure each part of the sentence serves its own function.
4. Place the “old information” referring back to the previous sentence at the beginning of the sentence.
5. Put the action in the verb!
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