

Genre Conventions in the Field of Bilingual Education

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The field of bilingual education seeks to understand the best evidence-based practices to most effectively educate students in two languages. It also seeks to educate effectively students who are bilingual, even if the school or education system uses the dominant language. Within the field of bilingual education, researchers utilize the conventions of the research report genre to inform readers of sufficient evidence-based practices in the education of bilingual students.

Two articles: “What Gets Lost When English-Only Writing Assessment is Used to Assess Writing Proficiency in Spanish-English Emerging Bilingual learners” (Escamilla, Butvilofsky, & Hopewell, 2017) and “Preschool teachers’ language and literacy practices with dual language learners”, (Sawyer et al., 2016) investigate improvements to bilingual education. Sawyer et al. (2016) focuses on preschool education, and researches through teacher surveys and codified classroom observations if teachers’ perspectives on bilingual education result in the use of evidenced-based practices to support bilingual students developing literacy. Their findings demonstrated that while there was high positive belief in bilingual students, there were overall few demonstrated evidenced based practices to support them, even from bilingual teachers (Sawyer et al., 2016). Escamilla et al. (2017) studies the examination of bilingual students writing samples across three different assessments. It concludes that only a holistic look of a bilingual student’s writing in both Spanish and English will effectively measure the cumulative grammatical and linguistic skill the student displays across both languages (Escamilla et al., 2017).

The first genre convention displayed in the articles was the use of the thesis. In both journal articles there is an immediate formation of the thesis within the initial introductory

section of the paper, but an explanation of findings is saved for later in the article (Sawyer et al., 2016 & Escamilla et al., 2017). The thesis is then focused into three specific research questions to guide the research process. The research questions posed by Escamilla et al. (2017) are more focussed on relationships and what can be deduced from the proven relationship, while in contrast Sawyer et al. (2016) forms broader research questions. The use of research questions to focus both of these studies also incorporates the scientific method into the research. Having the scientific method directing research is important because it assists in validating this study. The early introduction of the research question points the reader directly to the purpose and examination of the research and helps the reader evaluate the article to fit their research criteria. To signal the thesis statement, Sawyer et al. (2016) uses the word *we*, in reference to the researchers as a whole, while in contrast Escamilla et al. (2017) uses words like *purpose* and the phrasing “This article examines”. This difference shows that the genre does not have mandate one over the other, and the person perspective can vary, as long as an overarching professional formal tone is maintained.

Sandwiched between the thesis and the research questions for both articles is the presentation of previous research. For both Sawyer et al. (2016) and Escamilla et al. (2017) to have their research questions effectively answered, the authors must expound upon previous research. That research of effective evidence-based practice becomes a framework on which these new studies are hung upon. Thus, what is new is grounded in what is already proven and this is important in the research genre because this contributes to the validation of the recent research. Furthermore, Sawyer et al. (2016) even offers a critique of a previous study, pointing to

its limitations and calling for further research into this niche research community. This in depth inspection allows for growth in the field and can inspire further researcher.

Three key aspects are seen in the methodologies of both studies: 1) the exploration of the participants, 2) the description of specific assessments used, and 3) the explanation of the statistical calculations (Sawyer et al., 2016 & Escamilla et al., 2017). These three factors are critical within the genre because they allow for the duplication of the studies. Duplication is important because if another researcher produces the same results as the original study, the results of this repeated study are more feasible to be reflective of real life. Sawyer et al. (2016) contained an observation component of the researcher and the research team used methodology to explain the encoding or grading of the classroom observations and teachers' survey responses. Escamilla et al. (2017) similarly uses the methodology to describe the writing assessments and qualifications, time limits and the grading system of all three writing exams which contextualizes the presented data.

Data for both pieces is presented in paragraph form as well as in tables that are referred to within the writings (Sawyer et al., 2016 & Escamilla et al., 2017). The inclusion of data tables are helpful in clarifying the presentation of the data and the statistical analysis of the data. The genre convention of written description in conjunction with tables allows for the reader to understand how the research team is able to conclude from trends, rather than a large collection of data points. However, the location of the tables and graphs was not always effectively strategized. In Escamilla et al. (2017), the presentation of the line graphs is on separate pages, while the written analysis is on one page, separating the graph from the analysis and leading to

some confusion. Sawyer et al. (2016) placed a key chart on a separate page, allowing for the data to be large and spread out, enabling more clarity in the information being presented.

In both articles, key terms and jargon stem from two separate fields. The first field is that of bilingual education, with terms such as: dual language learners (DLL), Tools of the Mind Curriculum, Classroom Assessment Scoring-Curriculum, evidenced-based language and literacy practices, pedagogical knowledge, and emerging bilingual learners (Sawyer, et al. 2016 Escamilla, 2017). For Escamilla (2017), the term emerging bilingual learner was essential to her thesis and the authors defined it in a footnote as children who commence school with knowledge of two languages. This term also allowed the author to effectively differentiate between bilingual learners from english as a second language (ESL) students (Escamilla et al., 2017). Both reports also had technical terms relating the fields of statistical analysis (Sawyer et al., 2016 & Escamilla et al., 2017). Terms in this field include: correlation coefficients, item-total correlations, Cronbach's alpha, normality, linearity and homoscedasticity (Sawyer, et al. 2016 Escamilla, 2017). One statistical term defined in Sawyer et al. (2016) was social desirability bias, which is when a survey respondent describes themselves in the most acceptable manner to their peers. Both of these term categories are significant to the genre. Terms specific to bilingual education enhances the topical matter of the study, while statistical terms help with the duplication and validity factors mentioned previously that are important in the research paper genre.

The conclusions of Sawyer et al. (2016) follow the presentation of the data and the data calculations. Following the examination of the failure of their hypothesis to be met, the authors follow with a section focused on professional development. Likewise, Escamilla et al. (2017) follows their data analysis with a conclusion that narrows in focus in the last few paragraphs on

professional development. This is an important component of this genre in the context of bilingual education. This is because ultimately the field of bilingual education wants to change current education practices so that they reflect evidenced-based practices to effectively educate bilingual students. By pointing to effective teacher practices as concluded by each of these articles in the context of other current research that frames these studies, these articles are educating educators.

Both articles use the APA citation system (Sawyer, et al. 2016 Escamilla, 2017). The APA citation system is used in field of education because of the emphasis on current research-based practices. The APA system emphasizes the year research was published over location in a piece like MLA, which uses the page number or paragraph number in the in-text citation.

The tone is formal in both articles and both pieces use neither I or we except in targeted instances. The term “we” is introduced when the evaluation became more subjective. While this formal tone is not alone an indicator of validity or importance of the study, it is a genre convention because of the respectable and serious nature a formal tone conveys. Escamilla et al. (2017) features more prominently first person language when the research introduces a specific student sample example and draws conclusions from her work as a representative of the wider subset. However, when the subsequent discussion section is introduced the first person language is done away with, probably because of the author’s desire to strike a more authoritative tone (Escamilla, 2017). In Sawyer et al. (2016) “we” is used to describe the specific hypothesis of the researchers and what they hope to find, to describe the decisions made in the

statistical analysis of the conducted surveys and observations, and finally when explaining the results in the context of the wider literature.

The final defining feature of both texts is the stating the limitations of their research. While Escamilla et al. (2017) only briefly mentions the modest number of students in their study as a limitation, and then quickly defend the importance and validity of findings, there is an acknowledgement of the limitations of a small sample size on application of the results to a wider population. In contrast, Sawyer et al. (2016) has a section of the paper dedicated to the limitations of their research. Because their research was more survey driven, different biases and potential inaccuracies in self reporting were noted, as well as the limitations of a single observation of a classroom to extrapolate the wider classroom atmosphere. The significance of limitations for the genre relates to duplication and validity. Future researchers will want to seek to overcome the limitations seen in both studies in duplication so that the validity of the research is cemented.

For the genre of research papers in the field of bilingual education, the value of the various conventions lead to the validation of scientific research. Scientific studies can have errors; faulty conclusions can be drawn from flawed data results. From the thesis to the conclusion, these two articles display genre conventions so that research can be accurate and then applied in the wider classrooms of the world.

## References

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