



Book Review

by Pornsawan Brawn

Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language: a handbook for supervisors

By Brian Paltridge and Sue Starfield

Published by Routledge 2007

The book synopsis states that the changing demographics of higher education means that many academic supervisors find themselves challenged by the task of guiding non-native speaker students to complete their thesis or dissertation in English.

For most native speakers of English, penning academic texts and research can be a challenge as it requires a high standard of writing skills, organization, and knowledge in research and methodology. This challenge is compounded and becomes even more complex for international students or those Higher Degree Research (HDR) students from non – English speaking backgrounds as they have to contend with other social and linguistic issues such as finding accommodation, loneliness, language barrier and most of all, the necessity to function in the unfamiliar cross-cultural context.

The book *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language: a handbook for supervisors* focuses on the genre of thesis and dissertation writing, the research and supervision process as well as on its social and cultural context. The introduction discusses and raises awareness of supervisors who are faced with the changing demographic profile of their students in this era of globalized education. Supervisors are now required to guide their HDR students through their research and at the same time be sensitive to issues such as students' expectations, cross cultural communication and students' ability to negotiate and collaborate in an unfamiliar context.

Each unit in the book covers the following aspects:

- Aspects of language use particular to thesis and dissertation writing;
- Typical chapter structures and organization;
- Social and cultural expectations particular to writing a thesis or dissertation;
- What is expected of students in this kind of writing and at this level of study;
- Expectations of students and supervisors in the supervision and thesis writing process;
- Disciplinary differences in thesis writing

- What examiners expect of thesis and dissertation writing in English-medium universities;
- Insights into barriers faced by non-native speaking students studying for a research degree.

Among the main areas covered in the book, issues that are also discussed include plagiarism or textual borrowing, miscommunication and rhetorical devices (page 11). Chapter 1: Introduction, clearly spells out attitude to knowledge and different levels of study – discussing the change students experience in their studies – progressing from English secondary school education which engages in 'conserving' knowledge to the tertiary studies whereby students shift to 'critiquing' and 'extending knowledge. (See pages 7–12)

The linguistic value of the book is apparent in its tables illustrating stance and engagement strategies (p 149) – making claims and hedging. The book also highlights discourse markers such as attitude markers, metadiscourse and the linear and direct writing style inherent in academic writing. Unpacking the generic structure of the texts is one of the most useful aspects of this book. Samples of texts such as typical moves in thesis introductions and its strategic importance are included. The authors guide their readers through the chapters on writing the introduction, the background chapters, methodology chapter, the result chapters, discussion and conclusions, abstract and acknowledgements. Extracts from various disciplines such as engineering are also represented. In addition, the book also provides resources for thesis and dissertation writing in book and online formats to encourage readers to explore further.

(The only confusing feature for me is the use of the terms 'thesis' and 'dissertation' which are used differently in the USA. However a note on page 21 has clarified this for me in regard to the usage and the definitions.)

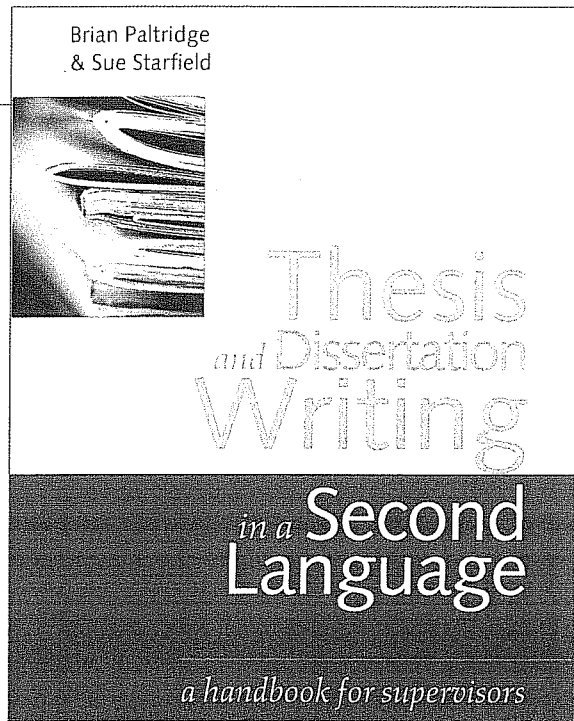
Despite its academic genre, the book was written with such clarity that it is accessible to readers of all persuasions – be it academic supervisors, ESL/ EFL teachers or HDR students who are interested in reading and learning about what is expected of their academic performance in English. This and its

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user friendly format provide a good foreground for readers and highlight the fact that non-native HDR students need both academic and strategic support from their supervisors to achieve what they set out to accomplish in their academic pursuit.


The book *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language: a handbook for supervisors* is an excellent read and a fantastic resource and it should not be read exclusively by academic advisors but by future HDR students of all professional backgrounds.

For teachers of ESL the book also has its relevance in raising awareness about characteristics of our learners, their preferred learning styles, their plight, self esteem (as illustrated by the comment from Nagata 1988:18 quoted on page 31 “I used to suffer from my own double perception of myself – the mature socially functioning person in my native language and the incompetent non – communicator in the target language”) and their linguistic needs. ESL teachers can also benefit from revisiting and refreshing their understanding of the cross cultural issues, adult learning principles, pragmatics and genre writing. The book is also an excellent and fantastic guide for those



who are considering or aspiring to pursue the Higher Degree Research (HDR) for a PhD.

I have found the book to be relevant and useful not only for supervisors but also for ESL teachers and Higher Degree Research (HDR) students alike.




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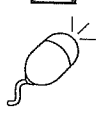
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