Research Methodology

Level : Master II

Speciality : literature and civilization

**LESSON TWO: WRITNG THE ABSTRACT AND THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**Introduction**

One of the final things a student needs to do is write their Abstract and Acknowledgements. The Abstract is an important piece of work as it is one of the first things an examiner will look at. The Acknowledgements are also an important part of the student’s text as they can reveal a lot about disciplinary membership and networks at the same time as showing gratitude to the people that have helped the student in the pursuit of their studies.

**The importance of the Abstract**

Cooley and Lewkowicz (2003:112) give this piece of advice on the Abstract:

[The Abstract] is written after the research has been completed and the writer knows exactly what is contained in the body of the text. It is a summary of the text and it informs readers of what can be found in the dissertation and in what order, functioning as an overall signpost for the reader. Although it is the last part of a dissertation to be written, it is generally one of the first a reader will look at. Indeed, if the Abstract is not well written, it may be the only part of the dissertation a reader will look at!

**Typical structure of the abstract**The abstract typically aims to provide an overview of the study which answers the following questions:

• What was the general purpose of the study?  
• What was the particular aim of the study?  
• Why was the study carried out?  
• How was the study carried out?  
• What did the study reveal?

The structure of an abstract can be broken up into a number of *moves* or stages, which should:  
Introduction

• provide context, background of the research  
• identify the motivation for the research  
• explain the significance/centrality of the research focus  
• identify a research gap or continuation of research tradition

Purpose

• identify aims or intentions, questions or hypotheses  
• develop aims or intentions, questions or hypotheses

Method

• identify/justify overall approach and methods  
• identify key design aspects  
• identify data source(s) and parameters  
• identify data analysis processes

Product

• present main findings/results of key aims, questions  
• present main findings/results of subsidiary aims, questions

Conclusion

• suggest significance/importance of findings beyond the research, considering contributions to theory, research, and practice  
• suggest applications (for practice) and implications for further research (Bitchener, 2010, pp. 11–12)

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**Women projections and self-perceptions in shashi deshpande’s “the dark holds no terrors”, Ahlem Mostaghanemi’s “chaos of the senses” and ahdaf soueif’s “in the eye of the sun”**

Abstract:

This Doctoral thesis enhances the contributions of postcolonial women writers in the field of  
third world feminist literature. It is a literary study that is concerned with the dilemma of identity  
and its relation to women projections and self-perceptions. It explores the process of fulfillment  
and self-actualization of the female identity in three novels written by women who belong to  
different cultures, namely, India, Algeria, and Egypt. Therefore, our investigation relies on  
psychoanalytical, feminist and postcolonial criticism. It examines the way women stereotypes  
are imposed and resisted in Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* 1980, Ahlem  
Mostaghanemi’s *Chaos of the Senses* 1997, and Ahdaf Soueif’s *In the Eye of the Sun 1992.* It  
explores the frames of representation of the Indian, Algerian, and Egyptian woman in in the  
postcolonial era, as well as the impact of gender roles and the dialectics of tradition and  
modernity upon the female protagonists’ psyche, leading to an identity crisis at both the  
individual and collective level. This study argues that the mechanism of transgression is an  
organic necessity and a rite of passage for the female subject to reclaim her self which has been  
violated sexually, economically and ideologically. It is also a subversive strategy of selfempowerment and self-actualization in a world where her projected gender roles inhibit an  
autonomous development of identity. Additionally, this research maintains that confrontation  
with the unconscious flux of the female protagonists’ past repressions plays a pivotal part in the  
progress towards self-emancipation from the confining attitudes as well as self-reconciliation  
with their past traumas. It concludes that the female authors have creatively pursued the  
female’s quest for an autonomous identity through a gradual process that deconstructs the  
prescribed gender roles and Imperial egocentrism in order to achieve self-actualization through  
resistance and self-reflection.

**Key words:** Identity construction, cultural feminism, psychoanalysis, transgression, selfactualization..

**The language of abstracts**

Cooley and Lewkowicz (2003) discuss the use of verb tense in abstracts. As they point out, there are two ways the student may view their abstract: as a summary of their thesis or dissertation, or as a summary of the research that was carried out. The first of these will typically use the *present simple* tense (This thesis *examines* …). The second will typically use the *past simple* tense (The study *revealed* that ….) and the *present perfect* tense (Previous research *has shown* that…). Table 11.1 is a summary of these different tense uses, with examples taken from different abstracts.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Present simple | This study *explores* the lived experiences of six international doctoral researchers over the course of two years of their candidature in an Australian university. |
| Past simple | The study *found* that the blogs were diverse in the ways they constructed meanings and in their textual practices. |
| Present perfect | Chinese personal blogs *have blurred* divisions between the virtual and the real, between the social and the personal, between the self and others, and between the trivial and the critical |

**Writing the acknowledgments section**

Hyland (2004b) has studied thesis and dissertation acknowledgments in detail. His work has shown not only that there are typical ways in which these texts are organised but also how students use these texts to display their disciplinary membership and networks at the same time as they thank the people that helped them in their academic undertaking. As Hyland (2004b, p. 323) points out, these short and seemingly simple texts ‘bridge the personal and the public, the social and the professional, and the academic and the moral’. Through these texts, students balance debts and responsibilities at the same time that they give their readers ‘a glimpse of a writer enmeshed in a network of personal and academic relationships’. The following is an example of how one of the students in Hyland’s study expressed gratitude in their dissertation acknowledgements section.

The writing of an MA thesis is not an easy task. During the time of writing I received support and help from many people. In particular, I am profoundly indebted to my supervisor, Dr James Fung, who was very generous with his time and knowledge and assisted me in each step to complete the thesis. I am grateful to The School of Humanities and Social Sciences of HKUST whose research travel grant made the field work possible. Many thanks also to those who helped arrange the field work for me. And finally, but not least, thanks go to my whole family who have been an important and indispensable source of spiritual support. However, I am the only person responsible for errors in the thesis. (Hyland, 2004b, p. 309)

In this acknowledgements section, the student shows disciplinary membership and allegiances at the same time as thanking people for their support. The acknowledgement observes appropriate academic values of modesty (*The writing of an MA thesis is not an easy task*), gratitude (*I am profoundly indebted to*, *I am grateful to*, *Many thanks to* etc.) and self-effacement (*I am the only person responsible for errors in the thesis*). These texts, thus, play important social and interpersonal roles in the thesis and dissertation writing process.  
Hyland points out that there are typically three stages in acknowledgements sections, a *reflecting move* which makes some introspective comment on the writer’s research experience, a *thanking move* which gives credit to individuals and institutions, and an *announcing move* which accepts responsibility for any flaws or errors and dedicates the thesis to an individual or individual/s. Examples of each of these moves is shown in Table 11.2. Only the thanking move is obligatory in these texts however, even though there are often more moves than this.



**ACTIVITY 11.4 ANALYSING A SAMPLE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS SECTION**Analyse the structure of the following acknowledgments section, as well as identify the ways in which the writer has expressed gratitude to the people that helped her with her thesis.  
**Acknowledgements**

This thesis would have been impossible without the support, suggestions, and help of many people who are gratefully acknowledged here. I owe my greatest gratitude to my principal supervisor … for his excellent supervision, unfailing support, and encouragement throughout my research process. I have been extremely fortunate to have him as my principal supervisor. He has been consistently clear, thorough, and supportive. He was always there and provided me with constructive and prompt feedback on my writing. Without his unwavering support, the completion of this thesis would have been impossible.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to my associate supervisor, …. for giving thorough feedback on my writing and helping me get connected with some of the universities for the interview data collection.

Special thanks are due to …. for their constructive comments and expert advice on my research design and early drafts.

My gratitude also goes to… for their suggestions, encouragement, practical advice, and help with analytical software.

I would like to extend my deep thanks to the infield professionals in the participating universities who offered generous help and support in the interview data collection process. They generously shared their experience and understandings with me and made me feel very welcome during the interview data collection.

Special thanks also go to the participating universities who have been very supportive of my research and have graciously granted permission for the use of the webpages collected in this research project.

I give my special thanks to … for her careful and professional editing of my thesis. Needless to say, all remaining errors and shortcomings remain my responsibility alone.

I also gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by the University through a… Scholarship, a …. Fellowship, and a … Fellowship.

Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to my husband, my family and friends that have been a constant source of love, understanding, support and strength. They made this journey joyful and memorable. Source: Tu (2016, p. iii)