WRITING & REWORKING ABSTRACTS

Kayla Heglas

Email: k.heglas@lancaster.ac.uk

Twitter: @kaylaheglas

OVERVIEW

- Audience understanding & current practices
- Structure & parts of an abstract
- Language within abstracts
- Editing for conference requirements
- What reviewers are looking for
- Examples
- Your own abstracts

AUDIENCE UNDERSTANDING & CURRENT PRACTICES

Knowing your audience

- What type of conference is this?
  - Is it in my discipline/field?
- What session(s) does my research fit in?
  - Can be based on case study, theory, method, etc.
- What information are they looking for?
- What information do they know/not know?

Knowing your discipline/ study design

- How do abstracts commonly look in your discipline?

KNOWING YOUR DISCIPLINE/ STUDY DESIGN

Corpus Linguistics | Critical Discourse Studies | Language & Cognition | Language Pedagogy | Literacy Studies | Multimodality/Visual Analysis/Semiotics | Pragmatics | Research Methodology | Second Language Acquisition/Language Acquisition | Sociolinguistics | Stylistics

Experiment based

- Outline experiment aims
- Outline experiment participants
- Method & Procedures
- Analysis
- Findings

Non-experiment based

- Outline contextual background/case study
- Method/Framework
- Analysis
- Findings

KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

- Connection to the session and/or conference
  - What information needs to be explicit to show the connection to the session/conference
  - What information can be left implicit?
  - What information needs to be explained for the audience?
- Audience understandings of your topic
  - Is it likely that they'll know your topic background?
    - i.e. location of study, experiment structure, artifacts analysed
  - Is it likely that they'll understand/know your methodology?
  - Do terms or phrases need explained & cited for your reviewer and/or audience?
- Depending on your answers to the questions above will help aim you towards information needed within your abstract

STRUCTURE

- Title
  - Catchy but also pinpoints a part of your study, i.e. 'critical study of', 'analysis of XXXX discourse'
  - (dependent on word count)
- Background/Context
  - Draw your reader in/ make it interesting
  - How much context do you need here?
- Theory → Methodology/ Framework
  - Briefly show you understand the theories you're drawing upon
    - This could be by citation, or making clear claims on your understanding of a theory
  - Briefly explain how your data is/will be analysed
    - Methodology/ Framework
- Analysis & Findings
  - Research questions! – what are you looking for/ questioning?
  - Do you have any preliminary findings (hedging language is important here)

USEFUL LANGUAGE & GENERAL TIPS

- Title
  - Catchy but also pinpoints a part of your study, i.e. 'critical study of', 'analysis of xxxx discourse'
- Background/Context
  - Interesting topic sentence that clearly lays out pertinent information, such as:
    - Location of study
    - Societal problem
    - People involved
- Theory → Methodology/ Framework
  - This study draws on…
  - Using X and Y's xxxx framework…
  - As part of xxxx methodology, this study…
- Analysis & Findings
  - Research questions asked
    - This analysis questions/ investigates/ …
  - Hedging
    - These findings suggest/ indicate…
    - It can be assumed that…
    - A possible explanation of this is…
- **OVERALL:**
  - Decide what session(s) your topic would fit in
  - Be clear & specific enough
  - BUT leave some room for changes/adaptations

EDITING FOR REQUIREMENTS

- What information is pertinent for the reviewer to:
  - 1) Understand its connection to the conference/ panel topic
  - 2) Be interested in the study
- Review knowing your audience
- Review current practices in your discipline

REVIEWERS

- Type of Reviewer
  - Is the reviewer part of a committee for a full conference –e.g. LAEL PG Conference
  - Is the reviewer accepting abstracts to their own panel? –e.g. RGS Conference 2019
- What is looked for?
  - Is it clear to what they're studying?
  - Is there clear understanding of the theory they're drawing on?
  - Is the analysis/findings portion have a clear aim and direction of study?
  - Does this section follow coherently from the background/context section?
  - Is the abstract well written in terms of language, grammar, etc.?
  - Does the author respect specified word limits?
  - Is the abstract relevant to the conference theme/subject?

EXAMPLE 1

Transformational plans for buildings and the people who inhabit them: A critical analysis of gentrification discourse in news media
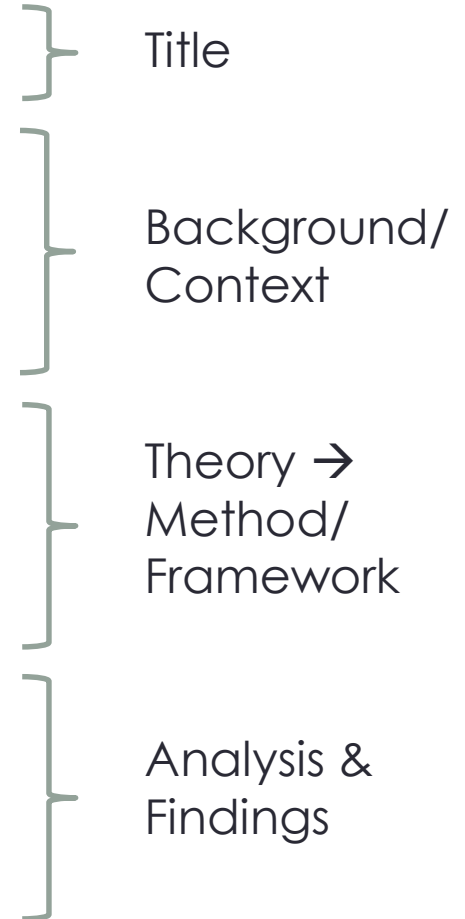
Title

The Hill District is Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's oldest Black neighbourhood, best known for its past cultural vibrancy in African-American lives. As Pittsburgh's steel industry soared the first phase of gentrification came with the building of the Pittsburgh Penguin's hockey arena (The Civic Arena), which displaced over 8,000 people and 400 businesses from the Hill District area leaving the remaining residents cut off from many basic amenities. However, more recently investors like Pittsburgh City Council and the Pittsburgh Penguins team have announced transformational plans to redevelop the former Civic Arena site in an attempt to revitalise the community and its economy. With both commercial and residential change happening in this area, Hill District residents are concerned about gentrification.

Background/ Context

Just as news media can mould the way the public is subjected to information, the author of the news can influence what people think about events in their communities. This project draws upon the Hill District 'transformation' in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and analyses news articles using Martin and White's Appraisal Theory and intertextuality. Appraisal Theory is used to analyse how the writer's values the entities (people and things) within the text that they produce (Martin 2005; 92), while intertexuality involves taking some part or aspect from a text and placing it within another, changing context and in some cases the meaning of the utterance.

Theory → Method/ Framework

This analysis exposes that the authors' intertextual recontextualizations tend to give great prominence to 'official voices' 'that help to frame the 'transformation' attitudinally positive, while there is a relative dearth of 'community voices' found in the articles. This way of speaking appears to be a way of speaking about the Hill District transformation to legitimise gentrification. Additionally, it shows that the authors' values carry an unequal weight of the positive and negatives of the 'transformation', and in most cases, the authors share the values with those in power over lower income/less powerful individuals.

Analysis & Findings

References:
Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. (2005). The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

EXAMPLE 2

Transformational plans for buildings and the people who inhabit them: A critical analysis of gentrification discourse in news media

Title

The Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is best known for its past cultural vibrancy in African-American lives. In the 1960s, the area saw its first urban renewal plan to build a sports arena, which displaced over 8,000 people and 400 businesses. After years of disinvestment, in 2014 public and private investors announced plans to redevelop the area in an attempt to revitalise the community and its economy. With the redevelopment announcement, Hill District residents are concerned about gentrification.

Background/ Context

This study draws upon the Hill District redevelopment and analyses news articles using discourse analysis approaches. This analysis exposes that the journalists' articles tend to give prominence to 'official voices' that help to frame the redevelopment as attitudinally positive, while there is a relative dearth of 'community voices' found in the articles. It suggests that the journalists' values carry an unequal weight of the positive and negatives of the redevelopment, and in most cases, the authors share the values with those in power over less powerful individuals, in a possible attempt to legitimise the redevelopment of Hill District.
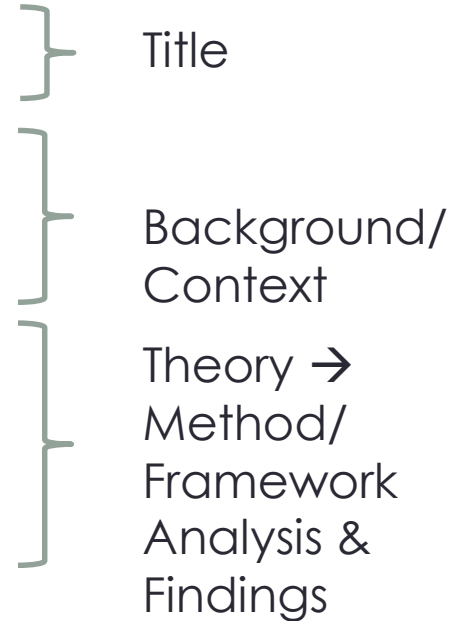
Analysis & Findings

EXAMPLE 3

Plans for homes and those who inhabit them: An analysis of redevelopment discourse in news

Title

The Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is best known for its past cultural vibrancy in African-American lives. As Pittsburgh's steel industry soared the first phase of gentrification came with the building of the Pittsburgh Penguin's hockey arena, which displaced over 8,000 people and 400 businesses from the Hill District area leaving the remaining residents cut off from many basic amenities. Recently investors like Pittsburgh City Council and the Pittsburgh Penguins team have announced plans to redevelop the former arena site in an attempt to revitalise the community and its economy. With both commercial and residential change happening in this area, Hill District residents are concerned about gentrification.

Background/ Context

Just as news media can mould the way the public is subjected to information, the author of the news can influence what people think about events in their communities. This project draws upon the Hill District 'transformation' in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and analyses news articles using Martin and White's Appraisal Theory and Intertextuality. This analysis exposes that the authors' recontextualizations tend to give great prominence to 'official voices' that help to frame the 'transformation' attitudinally positive, while there is a relative dearth of 'community voices' found in the articles. The journalism appears to be working to legitimise the redevelopment of Hill District either intentionally or unintentionally. Moreover, it shows that the authors' values carry an unequal weight of the positive and negatives of the 'transformation', and in most cases, the authors share the values with those in power over lower income/less powerful individuals.

Theory → Method/ Framework Analysis & Findings

REVIEWER COMMENTS – Approved but also needs resubmission

"Original topic fitting the overall conference theme of power. Reference to 'journalistic work' however should be better supported theoretically. The data set needs to be identified better – exactly which news texts were analyzed and which are the ideological orientations of such publications? "

ASKED TO SUMMARISE?

Summary of Abstract

- What does your study draw upon?
  - Location/ Case Study
  - Theory
- What are you questioning?
- What do your findings suggest?

Background/ Context

Theory → Method/ Framework

Analysis & Findings

TRY IT YOURSELF

- LAEL PG Conference
  - Discipline: Linguistics (all fields)
    - What does this say about audience & reviewers?
  - What information is necessary for clarity and interest?
- Submission requirements
  - Title 20 words,
  - Abstract 300 words,
  - Summary 50 words

THANK YOU!

Questions?