Chapter 14
Positioning Theoretical Perspective in Academic Writing:
Teaching Culture Theory in International Business Studies in the Context of Industry 4.0

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ABSTRACT

A main challenge for academic writing for students at master thesis level is to find the right perspective from which to launch the argument of the thesis. In the context of international business (IB) studies, the eclectic theoretical paradigm of the field offers students myriad frameworks from which to frame their research questions. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how perspective in academic writing can be taught and learnt in a systematic manner. Taking the example of the teaching of culture theory in international business (IB) studies, this chapter illustrates how the deictic or "pointer" function of the pronoun system in language can be used to help perspective research position and research design.

INTRODUCTION

Paradigm Shift Towards Systems Thinking in Pedagogy

Our young are our future. The skills taught to them today are what will carry them through for the management of the society and living of tomorrow. What is different today than just about thirty years ago is the increased complexity in society and living, much to the development of new technologies.

Graduating master students of international business (IB) studies face the challenge of entering a world of interconnectivity and complexity in the era of Industry 4.0 (i4.0). The twin learning goals for

students of IB are theoretical understanding and application of theory in practice. As part of their higher education programme, master level students often find themselves doing internships in large multinational enterprises (MNEs) before graduating whilst completing their thesis work. This internship period is part of their building of their social network and capital. The time spent at MNE not only allows for them to make industry contacts but to collect data for their thesis research and writing. In the era of i4.0, network and flows seem to be key concepts (Capra, 2015) not just in digital infrastructure but in the social circles, and understanding different perspectives becomes crucial.

Advances in the physical and social sciences made in the past thirty years have contributed towards an increased interest from scholars and practitioners towards the study of complex systems in the form of interrelated networks. Students who graduate from higher education learning at universities and who enter the global labour talent pool either as entrepreneurs or as employees in a company face a reality and work environment that is today far more technologically interconnected and complex than previous decades. Driving innovation and progress in organisations and in society will depend increasingly upon implementing processes based on an understanding of ecology and a systems perspective of management, organization and living. Keeping pace with this evolution of interconnectedness were ideas set forth by organismic biologists during the first half of the twentieth century. From an object-oriented perspective, scholars began to think in terms of processes, connectedness, relationships, patterns and context (Capra, 2015; Capra & Luisi, 2014). The move towards a holistic understanding of systems from the academic circles within the physical and social science has also led to current interest in the pedagogical formulation of integrated frameworks of theory and methods to be applied in various fields that fall broadly under the management of organizations and of society, from corporate strategy formulation to national / regional policy making (Theisens, Hooge & Waslander, 2016; Jacobson & Wilensky, 2006; Bar-Yam, 1997).

Education in i4.0: Positioning Perspective in Research Design

A primary concern for students at master thesis level in the process of formulating their thesis is research design and finding the right perspective within which their thesis research questions are framed. Greater complexity has increased the need to perspectivise, to be able to view issues, events and challenges in multiple facets in order to facilitate progress. Part of managing a complex system is the task of situating point of view, or perspective in terms of theoretical conceptualisation and framework of analysis to their academic writing is important because it acts as a scaffold upon which their research can be designed and research questions framed (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). IB studies, which provides foundational theories and tools of organization and management has inherent vocational underpinnings. This means that students of IB studies are not only exposed to a variety of theoretical conceptualisations for their chosen topic in their thesis work, but they will need to be able to apply that knowledge in order to acquire appropriate empirical data for their written analysis. Their thesis findings should ideally be transferable/generalizable to the real world working contexts of multinational corporations in the form of project management, corporate research and development (R&D) proposals, and/or executive education training programmes for example.

The challenge of finding a research perspective and a relevant theoretical framework is increased by the fact that theories within the field of IB studies are influenced from various disciplines that include economics, economic geography, sociology, psychology and political science to name but a few (Meyer & Peng, 2016). The process of having to choose between the numerous IB theories as conceptual framework to their thesis project, of perspectivising, and grounding their point of view in a theoretical

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