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Course of Study: Qualitative Social Science Research Methods

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6

WRITER VOICE

In Chapter 3 I described how showing the workings makes a major contribution to the rigour and validity of qualitative research. At a more micro level the rigour of qualitative research is to a large degree carried within the conventions that run throughout the discourse of academic writing. There is however a concern that these conventions alienate the person of the writer, and help create a distorted image of the people who are being written about. In this chapter I shall look at the first of these two issues and explore how the researcher as writer can work with the conventions and find her own voice. The second issue concerning the image, world and voice of the other people in the setting will be addressed in Chapter 8.

I will first contextualize the issue of conventions within the broader issue of genre and discourse and how this relates to the social world and the individual writer. This will be followed by examples from my corpus of written studies of how the researcher can write her own agendas into these conventions. The final part of the chapter will look at how the skilful use of these conventions increases the credibility of the research.

The struggle with convention

The written study in qualitative research represents a particular genre within the discourse and broader culture of qualitative research, as defined in Table 6.1. The relationship between these entities is clearly complex, and the distinction between them often blurred, especially as they are anyway only relative, heuristic concepts for making sense of a mélange of social reality (cf. Clark and Ivanič 1997: 15). As with 'culture', 'discourse' and 'genre' are movable concepts. Figure 6.1 therefore attempts only a rough representation of discourse and genre in the case of qualitative research.

The darker rectangular bubble in the figure contains examples of genres which are employed generally within the discourse of social science. The discourse of qualitative research is contained within social science and makes use of these same basic genres, while imposing its own variations on them, as do various discourses of academic disciplines and professions.[1] The focus of this book is on the cluster of written 'genres' at the top of the darker bubble which I am taking as having common features.[2] I exclude research reports, which involve a very different type of activity.

Table 6.1 Definitions

Term	Definition
a culture	a specific rule-governed set of behaviour e.g. the culture of a family, a street, a grocer's shop, international business, New York cab drivers
a discourse	a specific rule-governed set of language behaviour a larger set of 'language use conceived as social practice' (Fairclough 1995: 135), or 'domain of social practice' (Lankshear et al. 1997: 22) a way of talking e.g. the discourse of sexism, of parenting, of selling computers.
a genre	a specific rule-governed language event or text a smaller, perhaps more concrete entity than discourse a 'particularly social activity' (Fairclough 1995: 135) e.g. the genre of tax forms, of road signs, of science fiction literature, of university tutorials in the humanities, of job interviews in banking.

An important point demonstrated by Figure 6.1 is that the overall genre of the qualitative research written study derives generally from the social sciences, and is not, as some students think, imposed by the people who assess their assignments. Nevertheless, in simple terms, what and how the researcher writes is very largely decided by others within academic and professional communities (bottom left of the figure). Golden-Biddle and Locke make this point with reference to organizational studies:

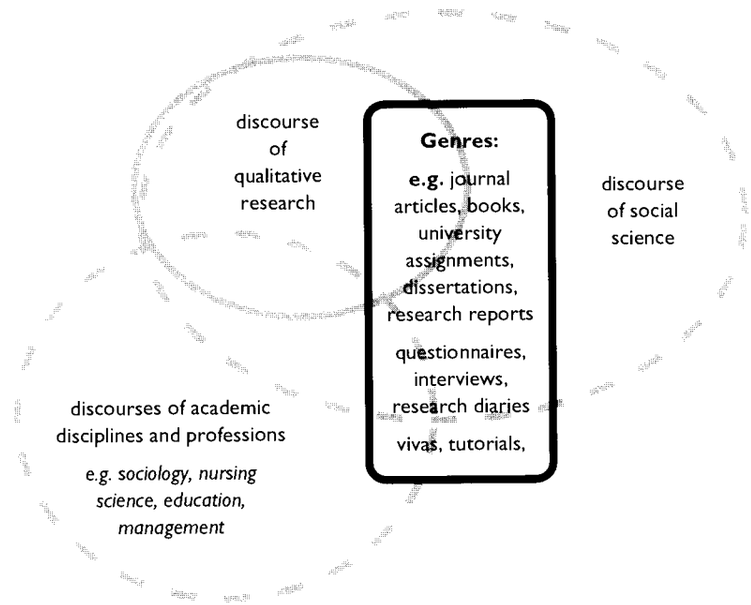
> Our professional community sets the topical boundaries for our writing, broadly delimiting the phenomena that fall within the domain of organizational studies. Our audience also broadly sets out the manuscript's structure and progression: the movement from literature reviews to methods, results and concluding discussion. (1997: 9)

This is largely to do with being accepted as members – 'those disciplinary writing conventions allow readers to consider our work as coming from one who is a member of the scientific community' (1997: 9). Miller et al. (1998) demonstrate this very well in their study of how researchers are constrained in the way in which they are allowed to write by research committees and supervisors in university departments. They talk about a deep conflict within qualitative research itself, between naturalist and progressive paradigms[3] connected to the degree to which researchers can express their own voice.

Reducing personal power

The ideological nature of qualitative research, both in its impact on the research setting and its participants, and in the way it constructs its

Figure 6.1 Discourse and genres of qualitative research



own realities, makes its writing a highly sensitive task. This is the case even for researchers who are fully versed and at ease with the conventions. For others, who criticize the conventions for representing current hegemonies of class and gender, of who can write and who is always written about, there is the added, political dimension. For them, 'texts become "an arena for struggle"' (Clark and Ivanič 1997: 174, citing Hall) over 'whose meaning prevails' (1997: 173, citing Vološinov) and how the world is thought to be organized (Richardson 1994: 518). The situation is even more problematic for many novice researchers, such as undergraduate and master's students, who find the discourse itself as difficult to conceptualize as the principles of qualitative research themselves.

For novice researchers, difficulty with academic writing is indicative not necessarily of weaknesses in basic literacy, but of becoming autonomous within a new, strange discourse. A personal anecdote demonstrates the problem:

Example 6.1: Not switching discourse

Mark had a first class bachelor's degree in English literature from a well-known university in England. He then became a language teacher, and, after accruing a considerable amount of professional experience, he enrolled on a master's programme in language education. As a master's student he

displayed considerable ability as a critical thinker, with a sophisticated awareness of the politics and ideology of education. However, he 'failed' as an academic writer. His assignments were articulate and elegantly written, and succeeded in communicating a profoundly critical argument; but they were in the wrong genre. Mark wrote competently in the polemic style of his undergraduate literature days, not in the technical genre of the social sciences. He found the latter impossible to work with and eventually left the programme.

This is a rather extreme case; but many students have problems of this type, especially when they consider English their own language, and feel it an affront to have to conform to conventions which they consider lacking in creativity and 'style'. Thus, the student who has difficulty with academic writing does not have to be a 'non-native speaker' of the language, or one who has difficulty in writing *per se*. In particular, students who are also experienced professionals, such as nurses, sportspeople, businesspeople or teachers, who are returning to education to get a higher degree or professional qualification, will experience discomfort if not anger when their accounts of professional experience are not accepted by their tutors and assessors unless presented in to them 'unnecessary' academic conventions. They begin to realize that as writers they cease to wield power over what they say (Clark et al. 1990: 85, citing Hall). They find themselves newly constructed, not as experienced professionals, but as 'junior member[s] of an academic discourse community' which decides for them what they are allowed to say, how they are allowed to say it and who they are allowed to be as writers. They have to 'conform to the standards' required by this community (1990: 91) and can feel cornered:

From the perspective of the student who disagrees with the orthodoxy, the options appear to be: conform to it, appear to conform to it, challenge it tactfully, challenge it openly, change the topic of the essay altogether. [...They believe] that they will be marked down if they disagree with or challenge their tutor or that the argument can be more persuasive if they follow the books [...] playing a safe game. (Clark et al. 1990: 94–95)

Ivanič and Roach make a useful distinction here, in the words of a mature student who is struggling with the discourse:[4]

'*Privilege power*' is what people acquire from joining the club: from conforming to the discourse conventions in order to gain qualifications, status and credibility. '*Personal power*' is the result of gaining control over our own lives, being in a position to exercise choice and know the consequences. Where academic writing is concerned, this means being able to write for our own purposes in our own way, choosing among the available conventions and at times flouting them in order to make a stand. (1990: 103, my emphasis)[5]

Mixed messages

A major factor which makes the conventions of academic writing in English[6] problematic for the novice is that there are conflicting signals. At first sight, a major criterion for 'acceptable' writing seems to be that there should be a huge amount of reference to other people, leaving very little room for the ideas and experience of the writer. This apparent negation of the person of the writer is compounded by the fact that what other people say in the literature, their ideas, findings and research methods, are not 'free goods': the writer must constantly acknowledge that she does not 'own' them, and say where she got them from (Bloor and Bloor 1991: 4, citing Goffman). This leads to what appears to be an overwhelming barrage of citing, referencing and bibliographical detail.

What puzzles the writer about this is that when she thinks she is 'succeeding' in citing chapter and verse of what other people have said, and gets all the referencing conventions correct, her work is still not accepted. There is a final subtle twist. Showing what you have read *is* important, but not for the purpose of showing you know the 'facts' which reside there. The crucial thing is to show what you *think* about what you have read (Bloor and Bloor 1991: 2). Indeed, points are given for criticizing respected authority. Here again, though, the person of the author seems to be negated, because this should be done *through* literature sources which tend to disprove rather than support authority (Richards and Skelton 1991: 24). Therefore, 'good writing' becomes a complex balancing act between showing that you have read, being critical of it, but doing this by still more citing of other people. The writer is discouraged from coming out and saying openly '*I* criticize this literature because'. The use of the *passive* pushes the person of the author into the background with 'this literature is *criticized* by X and Y, who say that ...'.

At this point the humanities and social science split in that the former uses a referencing convention which minimizes the intrusion of references to literature in the main text by placing them all in foot - or endnotes, as in this example:

Lane's purpose was to deliver Egypt and the Egyptians to his readers, 'to keep nothing hidden, to deliver the Egyptians without depth, in swollen detail'.[29] Lane wished to achieve the 'imposition of a scholarly will upon an untidy reality',[30] to appear only in the reserved persona of annotator and translator and lexicographer.[31] The humanity of Lane's narrative undertaking was sacrificed. (Kabbani 1986: 44, citing Said)

Although to a certain extent this makes more of the author's voice, as she is encouraged to be creative in manipulating her own and other's words eloquently, the writer speaks entirely through reference to others.

In contrast with this, the social sciences have traditionally maintained the passive, but without the eloquence, by adopting 'a "windowpane" model of language' in which 'discovered phenomena' are thought to be so clear to be seen that '"all associations, emotional colouring, and implications of attitude and judgement"' can be avoided (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1997: 3, citing Brooks and Warren).[7] Researchers must '"deliberately strive" to avoid all literary tropes in their writing so as to "tie scientific communication to observable phenomena by way of direct reference' (1997: 4, citing Pinder and Bourgeois). The result is an 'anonymous disciplinary code in which "it is concluded that" and only "the data", not researchers, "suggest" anything'. The researcher must 'write herself out of her texts and let "the findings speak for themselves"' (1997: 4). Talking specifically about ethnography, Richardson explains that:

> Needful to distinguish their work from travellers' and missionaries' reports as well as from imaginative writing, ethnographers adopted an impersonal, third person voice to explain an 'observed phenomenon' and trumpet the authenticity of their representations. [...] The author as an 'I' is mostly absent from the text, which talks about the people studied, the author exists only in the preface, establishing 'I was there' and 'I'm a researcher' credentials. (1994: 520, citing Van Maanen)

The 'windowpane' model is thus transformed into 'realist tale' (1994: 520) which adheres to a naïve naturalism in which a hands-off researcher describes a self-evident world.

Here, the loss of researcher voice is compounded by a much more explicit form of referencing characterized by such 'technical' devices as subheadings, numeration and diagrams, and by putting citations in the main text in brackets. To someone brought up in the 'higher' literary humanities (e.g. Example 6.1), the established genre of social science academic writing, with the same restrictions on the use of the first person, but the creative notion of 'rhetoric' removed, indeed seems dull, mechanical and impersonal.

New thinking

I wish to emphasize, however, that this picture of impersonal social science writing does not have to be, and that there *is* a place for powerful, personal authorship. There is a new thinking which comes from the progressive, postmodern, critical break with the naturalist, post-positivist tradition (see p. 20). This involves an acknowledgement that it is the agency of the researcher as writer that makes the research, which is associated with a post-structuralist realization of a '*continual cocreation of Self and social science*' which 'are known through each other' (Richardson 1994: 518, her emphasis) and an acceptance of creative

rhetoric, which plays an important part in thick description (e.g. Vidich and Lyman 1994: 41, Richardson 1994, Atkinson and Coffey 1995: 46, Bailey et al. 1999: 169). This creativity is demonstrated in Chapter 5 in the way in which themes, fragments of data and argument are woven to make a coherent whole, and in Chapter 4 in the way in which descriptive data is composed. The agency of the researcher is also being acknowledged more and more as an ideological force which has impact on relations with research participants and the way in which they are perceived. This has been discussed at length in Chapter 3, where I demonstrate the importance of a strong statement by the researcher about her own ideological and conceptual position (see p. 52), and cite Chris' statement that 'I, as a researcher, am an important part of this research', noting that his 'insideness' reflects the whole conceptualization of his research (see Table 3.1, p. 55). Moreover, the researcher, by using 'I', can create:

> a different, more transparent relationship with her readers. [...] She tries to make it very clear what her own opinions are. In other words, she tries not to disguise 'opinion' as 'fact' by using impersonal so-called objective language. (Clark and Ivanič 1997: 169).

Consequently, especially in professional applications of social science, the use of the first person has for some time been acceptable, and is becoming more so (e.g. Golden-Biddle and Locke 1997). There is a growing feeling among qualitative researchers that more attention should be given to the researcher as writer – to rectify the irony that 'we neither teach writing nor talk much about it' despite the fact that 'it is a practice that consumes much of our professional efforts' (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1997: x). This might be seen as a '"coming out" to colleagues and students' about a 'secret displeasure with much of qualitative writing, only to find a community full of like-minded discontents' (Richardson 1994: 517). Miller et al. see the move towards a liberation of researcher voice in writing as a major battle between 'the more participatory interpretive voice' and 'the more detached positivist voice' still very evident in postpositivist, naturalist[8] qualitative research (1998: 401). A researcher in their study remarks that '"the problem of speaking voice is more than just using the first person. It also includes how you see things. [...] Your perspective and your voice are integrated"'. Miller et al. pursue this notion that progressive qualitative research *requires* a liberation of voice. They note that in studies of dissertations it was found that a more "'restricted" [...] traditional reporting structure was often incompatible with researchers' "felt sense" [...] of the research experience' (1998: 401, citing Meloy), and that:

> The problem with interpretist researchers trying to use to use traditional research textual patterns: [is that] 'Qualitative analysis will only appear as bad quantitative research'. (1998: 401, citing Athanasas and Heath, and Nielsen)

The outcome is a reformed genre which keeps some of the more traditional social science conventions and changes or opens a discussion with regard to others. Even at the more radical end of this reform, there seems to be an adherence to explicit referencing conventions. This can be seen in this extract from an article which critiques traditional convention:

> We also struggle with *representation*, working hard to figure out how to represent and contextualize our narrators, ourselves, and the people about whom they are ranting. Under the tutelage of historians Scott (1992) and Katz (1995) and psychologist Cross (1991), we try to understand how and why these categories of analysis, these 'others', and these accusations are being cast at this moment in history, and who is being protected by this 'scope of blame' (Opotow 1990). (Fine and Weis 1998: 28, their emphasis)

What is new here is the way in which the writers liberate their own authorial voice by using the first person ('we', 'ourselves'),[9] non-formal, opinionated and self-revealing language ('figure out', 'ranting', 'try'), and personalized labelling ('these'). At the same time they rigorously cite all literary sources in the conventional way. The outcome is a far more explicit distinction between the voice of the researcher as writer and those of others than in the more traditional social science text or the ritually eloquent humanities text. They produce particularly bald-on-record statements about their identity and ideological pre-occupations:

> We are two Jewish white women academics, trained well in the rigours of social psychology (Michelle) and sociology (Lois), experienced in the complexities of critical ethnography, [...] eager to traverse the borders of research, policy, activism, and theory [...]. This article may be conceptualized as an early 'coming out' about some of the methodological, theoretical, and ethical issues that percolate from our fieldwork. (1998: 14)

(This can, though, get a bit too hyperbolic and over-indulged when they go on to talk about high email bills, long nights and discussions with friends and colleagues.) They also use, throughout their text, headings and subheadings to explicitly mark the structure and progression of their discussion – *Echoes (and aches) in our head*, with subsections. As with themes in data analysis, using headings also helps the researcher to place her creative stamp on the text.

Writing as investigation

A key part of this new thinking is the realization that writing is itself part of the process of qualitative investigation. Part of the positivist vision of research has been the view that data is collected until the research is 'finished', at which point 'writing up begins'. Post-positivist, naturalist qualitative research continues this tradition with the idea that there comes a point at which social exploration is exhausted and data complete and self-evident, and the writing-up stage is simply a matter of reporting. This is established in the British university system, where doctoral students are given a 'writing-up year' after the end of their registration, during which they do not get supervision. Golden-Biddle and Locke confirm that 'this "it's as plain as the nose on your face"' assumption does not square with the experience:

> When we sit in front of our terminals with our piles of field notes, transcripts, analytic memos, expecting to 'just write up' [...] we discover all too clearly that it is not that simple. [...] Contrary to the windowpane assumptions of findings as self-evident, we never yet have had a piece of data tell us its significance. (1997: 6)

Golden-Biddle reports that 'she has not yet been able to figure out how to tell in journal article form what, to her, is the central story of her fieldwork' (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1997: 9). Thus, contrary to the traditional view, Richardson presents writing as itself:

> a *method of inquiry*, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of 'telling' about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of 'knowing' – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. (1994: 516, her emphasis)

This can be seen in the way in which the sense of argument develops throughout the whole process of data collection, analysis and organization.

This makes qualitative writing in essence very different from quantitative writing. Qualitative writing becomes very much an unfolding story in which the writer gradually makes sense, not only of her data, but of the total experience of which it is an artefact. This is an interactive process in which she tries to untangle and make reflexive sense of her own presence and role in the research. The written study thus becomes a complex train of thought within which her voice and her image of those of others are interwoven. Therefore, qualitative research 'depends upon people reading it [...]; its meaning is in the reading' (Richardson 1994: 517). The voice and person of the researcher as writer not only becomes a major ingredient of the written study, but has to be evident for the meaning to become clear.

Genre as gateway and social exploration

Another contribution to this new thinking comes from an understanding of how conventions, genres and discourses are part and parcel of the

fabric of complex society which all individuals need to understand and navigate. Recent work in literacy studies suggests that learning or confronting academic genres might have the intrinsic value of learning or confronting how society works. These genres thus play the role of 'secondary discourses', which, like 'schools, clubs, churches, government departments etc.', are 'encountered through participation in social institutions beyond the primary group' (Lankshear et al. 1997: 26). This means that even those students of qualitative research, who are only 'passing through' the peripheries of social science for the purpose of getting qualifications or a general education, can benefit from this experience. This experience helps instil 'critical literacy' as they learn how social 'truths' are constructed differently within different discourse communities and their genres. Thus, struggling to achieve personal power involves coming to terms with how discourses and genres help construct the wider politics of their world. People need to know through this kind of experience that where one 'biological and medical' discourse 'renders the statement "the tubercle bacillus causes tuberculosis" obviously true', another 'socio-political' discourse 'renders it problematic' (Gee 1997: xviii).

Understanding how dealing with discourse and genre is social initiation in the general sense leads to an appreciation of its specific importance in professional and academic socialization. For students and novice writers who wish to join the discourse community of qualitative researchers, the genre of academic writing behaves as a *gateway* through which they must pass, first to be allowed membership, and then to participate creatively within the community, whether from within academic departments or from within their own professional communities (bottom left of Figure 6.1).

Hence, despite the critique of conventions as ideology, they must be learned before they can be manipulated. Throughout this book I show how the conventions of academic discourse are necessary to maintain the rigour of qualitative research. Here I wish to demonstrate that this does not mean that the writer has to minimize her presence. The discussion on the preceding pages has shown that there is indeed room in the genre to allow her to use the conventions while at the same time being creative and achieving personal power. I think that the degree of variety seen in Chapter 5 already illustrates this potential. Moreover, the verisimilitude of qualitative research is very much created by the way in which a representation is accepted within the culture of the discourse community within which it works. So it is partly that the audience is *used* to this particular genre of television documentary, and has become party to its verisimilitude, that gives it credibility. One could cynically say that we have been 'conditioned' into believing whatever we see in television documentaries; but I doubt if we are that stupid, because genres do change and revitalize themselves as audiences demand more. It is nevertheless necessary at least to begin by working from within the conventions of that community.

The author writes back

Given that these openings do exist within the qualitative research genre, it is necessary to identify exactly where they are – where the researcher can express her voice to claim personal power in writing. One such place has already been dealt with in Chapter 5, where I demonstrated how the whole written study is driven by the researcher's argument, marked by personal phrases such as Pierson's use of 'I interpreted these comments to mean' in his discursive commentary on nursing assistants' accounts (see p. 114). All the way through there is a dialogue between 'your argument and agenda' and 'your evidence', selected and organized by 'you', which is driven firmly by the former. This is illustrated in Figure 6.2 (adapted from Figure 3.1), which shows how this argument and agenda are placed throughout the whole written study. In the figure I have used the same phrases for both the discussion of issues and data analysis chapters or sections to indicate that literature is collected, organized under headings, selected from, and embedded in the fabric of the argument in a very similar way to data. I have already given examples of common conventions (eg. p. 63 and p. 119). Hence, 'your' evidence includes literature as well as data; and in both cases this is set against *your* experience.

There are various ways in which the researcher can create and assert her own space. The following are examples, this time taken from all parts of the written studies in my corpus.

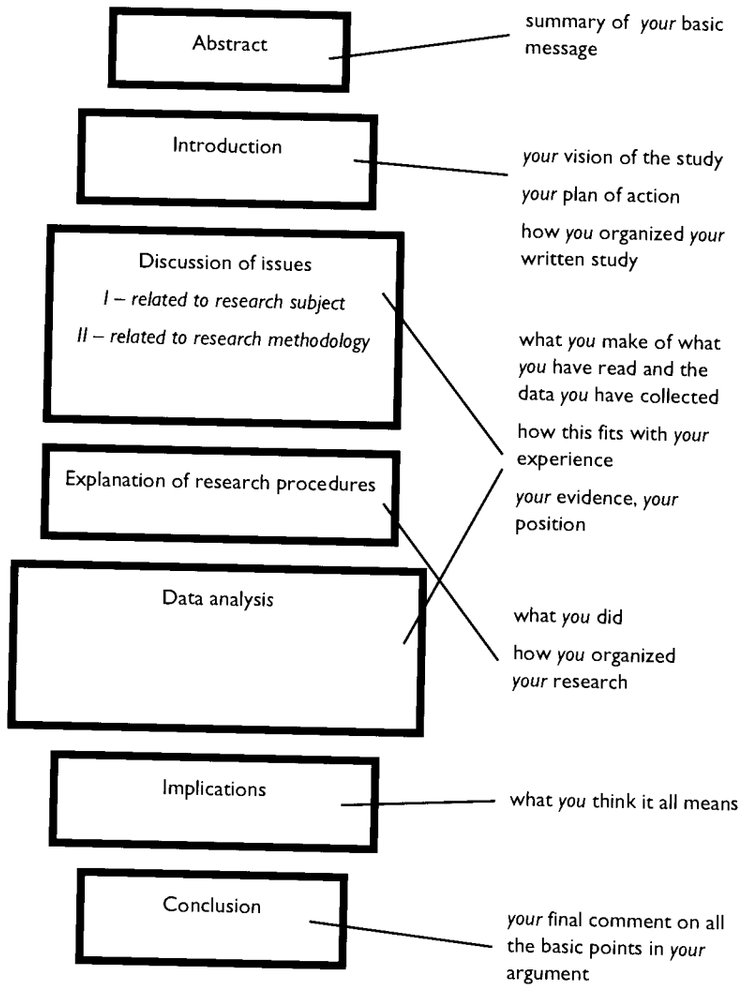
Asserting agenda

Albert, in his study of risk in cycling, declares his own research and agenda clearly within his discussion of issues, where he looks at literature:

> For a number of years I have been examining the process of reality construction in the subculture of serious recreational road cycling and racing (Albert, 1990, 1991, 1997). As I understand that subculture, it is a unified one, more accurately described as a 'social world' in the sense that Crosset and Beal (1997) use the term. (1999: 159, my underlining)

It is clear from the underlined phrases what *he* has been doing and what *he* thinks. This is done primarily by using the first person. Moreover, he skilfully takes ownership of the literature he cites. He takes the term

Figure 6.2 Placing your argument and agenda



'social world' from Crosset and Beal, acknowledges that it belongs to them by placing it in inverted commas, but uses it as a resource to strengthen *his* argument. He thus places himself and his quest within a wider discussion, within which he becomes the focus. He also shows that he has his own credentials and stake in this discussion as he cites his own work – not just one but three published pieces.

Maguire and Mansfield make a similar personal statement in the first paragraph of their study of aerobics classes, again taking terminology from the literature to support their cause – 'We locate the exercise discourse within a wider network of interdependencies defined as the "exercise-body beautiful complex"' (1998: 109, my underlining).

The novice reader might think that these writers can 'get away' with this because they are published researchers. After all, Albert cites his own work. However, Hiroko, in her first major piece of writing, her master's dissertation, writes in her introduction:

> I took a general English course for about six months [...]. This has given me a good basis for comparing the learning habits of the Japanese and those of others [...]. I had several opportunities to talk with many Japanese students [...]. To my surprise, it seemed that many teachers still have stereotypical ideas. (Hayagoshi 1996: 2, my underlining)

This shows her own presence in the work; later in the introduction she continues, but sets an open, honest mood. She shows 'where she comes from', sets the whole tone of the work and creates the impression of the sorts of claims she can make. It may seem inappropriate for a researcher to show that she is 'surprised' – but why not? After all, she is only a person like the rest of us, trying, like the rest of us, to make sense of the world. She continues to state what she intends and aims:

> In this dissertation, I intend to contrast British teachers' perceptions of Japanese students [...] with Japanese students' own perceptions [...]. The goal of my dissertation is to find out if there is a gap [...]. If there is a gap I aim to determine its nature. (Hayagoshi 1996: 2)

This is very clearly *her* dissertation. She puts forward herself and her own experience and agenda very strongly from the outset.

It is not only the use of the first person that gives the writer voice, as can be seen in this extract from the discussion of issues section of Emami and Ekman's study of elderly Iranian immigrants in Sweden:

> A knowledge of cultural factors plays a very important role within the health care field. [...] If cultural differences are not given appropriate consideration, conflicts and problems are sure to arise, which will potentially prevent a healthy sense of well-being, and/or delay illness recovery (Leninger, 1978; Lipson and Meleis, 1989; Lipson, 1992; Meleis et al., 1992; Ekman et al., 1993). (Emami and Ekman 1998: 184, my underlining)

The underlined verb particles show that the authors use a series of active sentences (i.e. not in the expected passive voice) – x plays, y are not, z will – to state their view of the way things *are*. Indeed, the second two underlined phrases mark a conditional sentence which sets *their* conditions – if x, then y. Once again, literature is brought in at the end, not simply to show that they have read, but to reinforce their point of view. Literature is thus their evidence, used as a resource to support their argument. Note the technique of listing references to literature to provide maximum strength of support within a short space. Albert also uses this technique:

> In sport, the propagation of these dominant values is especially prevalent in hierarchical environments like high-school and college-level athletics

(Curry and Strauss, 1994; Messner, 1992; Nixon, 1994, 1996; Young and White, 1995). (Albert 1999: 158)

The reader might remember that Pierson also uses literature in this way to support the argument in her data analysis section.

Making personal contact

Another way of establishing the self of the researcher is by speaking as a person to the person of the reader. This is done explicitly by Pierson in her study of feeding demented care residents. She begins in her introduction by creating a sense of common experience with her readers:

> Excluding infants, the actual work of feeding is an activity you normally perform by and for yourself. You decide about the bite size and the mix of foods. When you are fed, someone else makes those decisions for you. You are then expected to accept what the feeder gives you and how he or she delivers it. (1999: 127)

The use of 'you' distinguishes this as personal experience from what follows, which refers to 'observations in long-term care [...] facilities' and the 'many studies' which catalogue them. Similar examples occur in Antonia's account of growing up in Greece and Herrera's account of hearing the noises of the school from her student hostel, both of which set the scene for their written studies and include strong personal phrases – 'I learnt', 'I wondered' (see p. 28).

In the example above, Albert might be thought cautious because his exposure of self does not occur until the third page of this study. However, he has already set a personal tone by starting with an anecdote of how a sports commentator talks about danger – 'British sports commentator Phil Liggett articulates features of the wider sport of cycling' (1999: 157). By referring to Phil Liggett by name, he draws on a sports cultural reference which he shares with his readers.

Shaw, in her study of women's body image, uses a less personal tone throughout. However, in her introduction she makes contact with her reader's experience of 'everyday life' by referring to advertising, the press, and to personal contact with a psychiatrist, all of which are centred around a topical public concern with anorexia:

> The 'Omega' watch company withdrew its advertisements from 'Vogue' magazine in protest at the use of 'distasteful' pictures of a model of 'anorexic proportions', which could influence its audience of 'young and impressionable females' (*The Times*, 31 May 1996). Following this incident, a psychiatrist working with young women with eating disorders commented:
>
> > I do feel that there is a strong relationship [...] virtually all of our patients report having been influenced by the media in some way (personal correspondence, June 1996). (Shaw 1998: 7)

Note that even though this is anecdote, Shaw still makes use of academic referencing conventions – being careful to place quoted phrases in inverted commas, indenting the longer quote from the psychiatrist as though it were literature or data, placing details of the newspaper articles in brackets, and using the accepted convention of 'personal ...', properly dated, for impromptu encounters.

Generally, making personal contact in this way emphasizes the close connection between qualitative research and everyday experience. Qualitative researchers *are* just people, going about their daily lives and trying to make sense just like everyone else. The difference is that, like Shaw, they take care to catalogue and make clear reference to their evidence. Thus, Herrera's whole dissertation is simply an extension of her initial 'I wondered'.

Experience as evidence

The researcher's own experience of life, which technically stands outside the realm of 'data', in that it has not been systematically collected within the research setting, can also be used as evidence. In the above examples, it provides evidence for the importance of the research. It can also provide valuable evidence once the major argument is well under way in either the discussion of issues or data analysis chapters or sections. This can be seen in these two extracts from my study of international curriculum innovation. The first is part of my chapter on methodological issues. A statement from my own experience about gaining access to research settings is sandwiched between a general, theoretical statement (underdotted) and support for this in the form of reference to literature (underlined):

> One of the most crucial aspects of gaining access to a situation for both curriculum developers and ethnographers is finding local personalities who are both accurate informants and who will lead them into the *informal order*. It is common, in my experience, to spend a considerable amount of time, on first arriving in a new host situation, working through false leads, and discovering that personalities first met are not *key* personalities at all. Hammersley and Atkinson, citing a range of ethnographic studies, refer to key local personalities as '*gatekeepers*' (1983: 63–68). (Holliday 1991: 141, original emphasis; my underlining added)

In one sense, this statement of experience is redundant in that the rest of the extract is sufficient to carry the point. However, adding the statement of experience brings personal presence and ownership to the discussion, which may indeed strike a chord with readers who have had similar experiences, also reminding them that this a 'real world' issue. The phrase with which I begin my personal statement, 'it is common',

tones down the claim I make to suit experience of this type. Thus, a statement of experience *adds* to the overall argument, but is not sufficiently interconnected with other data to stand by itself in any significant way.

Once again the conventions are used to preserve personal voice by demarcating the three types of statement in the extract. The phrase, 'in my experience', marks one. The reference to literature is marked at the beginning by the names of the authors, and at the end by the reference in brackets. The reference to literature is also strengthened by 'citing a range of authors' – giving yet further validity to my personal experience. If these explicit markers were not there, the text would look like this:

> One of the most crucial aspects of gaining access to a situation for both curriculum developers and ethnographers is finding local personalities who are both accurate informants and who will lead them into the *informal order*. It is common to spend a considerable amount of time, on first arriving in a new host situation, working through false leads, and discovering that personalities first met are not *key* personalities at all. Key local personalities can be referred to as '*gatekeepers*'. (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 63–68, their emphasis)

The result would be an appearance that the whole thing is attributed to the literature – which would in fact be inaccurate – and the loss of my personal statement and the overall personalization of the text.

The second extract is from a data analysis chapter. It also shows a personal statement embedded, this time, between references to data:

> When we arrived LL was not there. Another [local] lecturer, LT was there instead. [...] LT said that s/he had last seen LL several weeks ago, and that s/he believed that s/he was not feeling very well at that time. (Obs.69, site 9, LT, LL)

> It is not clear whether or not this type of communication problem was beneath other examples of miscommunication, or whether it was simply due to misunderstandings, which were a common occurrence in project business (personal experience). For example, on one occasion I had understood that I had been invited to give a demonstration lesson and instead found that I was expected to give a public lecture (obs.9, site 10). (Holliday 1991: 246, my underlining)

Once again, conventions are used for explicit demarcation. The indentation marks the long fragment of data at the beginning. The underlined statement is marked as a paraphrase of data by 'for example' at one end and the bracketed reference at the other. 'This type of communication problem' marks the underdotted statement as discursive commentary on the indented data fragment; but then, the bracketed reference to 'personal experience' shows that what remains is from my own experience. Again, this adds valuable personal voice to the discussion. Note also how the phrase 'a common occurrence' once again

reduces the claim to one which is appropriate for a personal observation of this nature.

The conventions of explicitness in social science writing can thus be used to *preserve* the voice of the researcher by demarcating her presence from those of others. The use of the first person and personal statement shows where the researcher is speaking for herself; the use of bracketed reference shows where she is using other sources. Unlike the more traditional humanities genre, in which the rhetoric creates a sense of seamless continuity between hidden author and an ongoing texture of literature, the social science genre provides explicit segments within which the writer can carve a personal territory.

Creating coherence

Once the researcher has asserted her presence, she also has to make her presence worthwhile and meaningful. Within the academic discourse community to whom she is writing, she must make herself a credible presence. Once again, the conventions of the writing genre can be used to achieve this. Just as a teacher in a classroom, a technical demonstrator or a person in the street depends on devices such as whiteboards, wall displays, maps, pointers or simply arm movements to *show* other people what she knows or what they should do, the researcher has devices at her disposal within the conventions of writing. In several places I have drawn attention to the way in which researchers refer to various sources of evidence which exist elsewhere – literature, data, the press, and personal encounter sources – often with the use of brackets. Referencing of this sort is not simply a tedious mechanical insertion into the flow of the text, it is a very useful means of pointing. Table 6.2 illustrates how this is not an esoteric process, but that there are parallels with, for example, the genre of oral presentations, which is used extensively throughout the professional world. In the same way, there are parallels with teaching and lecturing. The conventions of academic writing are thus no more than specialist representations of much broader forms of communication, using alternative means to compensate for the lack of face-to-face contact.

The following examples show how researchers *point* in this way to information elsewhere within the text in figures and tables, and longer pieces of supportive information appended at the end of the text.

Pointing to further detail

Byrd, in her study of maternal care giving in the United States, refers to a table in which she lists different types of consequences of how

Table 6.2 Pointing across genres

Oral presentations	Social science writing
The presenter supports, demonstrates and enriches what she says	The researcher writer supports, demonstrates and enriches what she writes
(a) with extra information, diagrams, tables etc. (b) on transparencies, wall displays and handouts (c) by referring to other work, writings, examples etc. (d) by linking different parts of the presentation.	(a) with extra information, diagrams, tables etc. (b) embedded near the main text or appended (c) by referring to other literature, data etc. (d) by linking different parts of the text.
This is facilitated by pointing – often using body language, changes in intonation etc.	This is facilitated by references to which date, page, part of the table or figure – often using brackets, indentation etc.

nurses ask questions during home visits. Placing this detail elsewhere in the text frees her to get on with her argument in the main text. However, she needs to point to where this information resides by stating that 'the potentially possible negative consequences are shown in Table 1 under headings that emerged from an earlier literature analysis (Byrd, 1997b)' (Byrd 1999: 30). Furthermore, she skilfully links the information with what she has done elsewhere in the literature. Emami and Ekman, in their study of immigrants in Sweden, use a figure to show the stages of selecting informants. This enables them to pinpoint aspects of this detail within their main text, while directing the reader to where the rest of the detail resides:

> Within the list received, 123 individuals fulfilled the selection criteria and were contacted by letter to request their participation in the study (Figure 1). Only 90 people received the communication; 33 letters were returned due to outdated addresses. (Emami and Ekman 1998: 186)

The statements following the bracketed reference to the figure, though not explicitly connected, clearly also refer to aspects of the figure once the figure has been seen. The underlined phrases in the next example show how Antonia, in her study of open learning, is more explicit in guiding the reader to different parts of the table:

> Although the receptive skills such as reading and listening are catered for, the productive skills of speaking and writing are rather neglected. This point is illustrated in Table 2. The section on the left describes the nature of the self-access materials in the centre. [...] The right hand column illustrates the nature of the productive skills. (Linehan 1995: 12, my underlining)

The reader will have noted how my own writing throughout this book makes full use of tables and figures in this way. Elsewhere, Antonia refers the reader to information that is placed in appendices because it is too extensive to include in the main text. She carefully indicates which appendix in the bracketed references:

> This is particularly true of the vocabulary listed in the letter of complaint (see Appendix 6D). They [the students] also seem to enjoy the postcard writing possibly because they are provided with postcards on Canterbury at the end of the pack to send to friends (see Appendix 7C). (Linehan 1995: 39)

Talbot, in her study of how gender is constructed in a teenage magazine, places her major data source in the appendix. As with Antonia's table, she guides the reader around what she considers the important features of the appended material. She has just introduced the idea that the magazines promote the idea of sisterliness:

> I will look for evidence of this sisterliness in the sample of data in the Appendix for this chapter (pp.197–9). The sample I have chosen is a consumer feature. [...] The two page feature contains various elements: a column of text covering an assortment of topics relating to lipstick (reproduced on p.197 and the first paragraph of p.198, and referred to below as 'the column'). (Talbot 1992: 181)

She is careful to make very specific reference to the pages on which the appended material appears; and in the last line she sets up a form of language with which she will continue referring to the appendix. Especially in short articles and chapters like this, the researcher is not normally expected to append data. This is an exception because she is doing discourse analysis of the written text, which therefore needs to be seen by her reader. Furthermore, the data is small and *can* be appended in two pages. Nevertheless, she is unable to reproduce its full pictorial quality, presumably because of lack of space and publishing cost. Talbot also explains this to the reader – 'The article is reproduced [...] without photographs and the proliferation of "kissprints" which adorned the segments of the written text' (1992: 181). This is a good example of how material outside the main text still needs comment within the main text. Many novice writers fail to do this, appending material and inserting figures and diagrams without making any explicit reference to them, and are then surprised when their readers do not know how to make use of them, or even ignore them.

Pointing to other parts

Another example of providing commentary is from my thesis, where I include, as a figure, two sketches of how students sit in the classroom. As well as explaining how the sketches relate to specific fragments of

observation data, I also summarize what they show (underlined), in one case enriching this with an extract from the data:

> The sketches, in Figure 5.4, made during observation, of the seating arrangements in two classes, show a tendency for blocks of seating according to gender. Sketch A shows the local lecturer's class in observation 30 in which: 'The men were mainly at the back of the room and the women at the front, with two small colonies of women in the men's section' (obs.30, site 11, LN). [...] Sketch B shows the expatriate lecturer's crowded class of 450 in observation 39 in which the division corresponded with the central aisle of the room. (Holliday 1991: 276, my underlining)

In longer pieces of writing, it is also sometimes necessary to refer to different parts of the text itself. This extract is from the implications chapter of my thesis where I draw together the major points from my data analysis chapters. The bracketed page references show where the discussion of these points can be found:

> That standards were falling was partly due to the increasing numbers of students per lecturer in university English departments, created by increased enrolment, a relaxation of entry standards, and local staff working abroad (pp.185–6, 283). This resulted in class sizes of up to 450, with the majority between 100 and 200, which was compounded by ill-designed rooms with poor acoustics and difficult institutional conditions (pp.186, 223–8). These conditions both underlined the need for change and for innovation specially tailored to the local situation, as expressed in hypothesis 1 (p.235): –
>
> *Hypothesis 1*: Difficult and unchangeable classroom conditions require the adaptation of imported curriculum innovation. (Holliday 1991: 400)

The extract also shows how I took the decision to reproduce the hypothesis from page 235, thinking that it was too much to expect the reader to keep referring back to something which I was also going to make use of in this part of the text. One can also see the concentrated quality of a piece of writing designed to collect points from other places. The first sentence thus contains a list of points; and each bracketed reference contains a list of page numbers. (See my comments on listing literature references on p. 135.)

Achieving credibility

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the researcher as writer can be firmly in control of the genre of writing qualitative research. Although it is very technical in the way in which multifaceted aspects of evidence and arguments are pulled together, she can take a central position in guiding the reader to the places where *she* wishes. Table 6.2 shows how one aspect of the genre, that of referring as pointing, has parallels in other professional areas. The same parallels can be found for all aspects of the genre referred to in this book, across several aspects of social life. Therefore, learning academic writing should contribute to developing broader skills in precise communication. The proponents and specialist users of academic discourses need to be aware of and communicate their own position within the wider world of culture, discourse, genre and ideology – to achieve the sociological imagination I refer to at the end of Chapter 1. They must not, however, take themselves too seriously, nor exude an image of privilege power in what they do.

Summary

The following points have been made in this chapter:

(a) The conventions of writing qualitative research are placed within the larger genres and discourses of social science academic writing.
(b) Academic writing is an 'arena for struggle' in which students and researchers can find it hard to achieve personal power and voice.
(c) There is however new thinking, especially within progressive qualitative research, which provides scope for researchers as writers to use the conventions to establish a strong personal presence in the genre.
(d) This is centred around realizations that writing is itself part of social investigation in which researchers impose their thinking on the realities they wish to present.
(e) The mastery of the academic genre is also part of an overall acquiring of cultural competence in late modern society, which involves a critical awareness of the politics of discourses.
(f) The use of the first person is a major device for separating the researcher's agenda from the other voices in the text, thus increasing transparency and accountability.
(g) Personalized forms of discussion also enable the researcher to make contact with the reader and emphasize the 'everyday' nature of qualitative research.
(h) Explicit, personalized referencing enables the researcher to take control of the bringing together of interconnected elements, and to show the reader where she wishes her to go.

Notes

1. It should be remembered that because what constitutes 'a genre' is relative, another drawing of this figure could indicate separate genres of, for example, 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' research journal articles. Whether these are separate genres, or variations

within a broader genre of social science journal article, is to me a purely academic question, depending on viewpoint and level of generality. In a sense, as one zooms in out of the picture represented by Figure 6.1, one will get, respectively, more smaller, or fewer larger genres. One could also conceive of separate genres, say of introductions and conclusions within journal articles. There are also perceptible generic divisions between the various discourses of academic disciplines and professions operating within and through the different academic discourses (bottom left of the figure).

2. In the detail of each Chapter I present variations between say articles and assignments, between differences connected with discipline and profession, with the style of individual writers, and also with discoursal differences between ethnography, grounded theory and so on (see p. 18) – which could have been included in the figure as yet another circle.

3. I use my own terminology here to distinguish the two paradigms (see p. 18).

4. Roach is the student in question, who co-authors this paper with Ivanič, from the university language support unit, who is helping Roach with her writing (Ivanič and Roach 1990: 104).

5. These two types of power can also be aligned with two types of voice suggested by Clark and Ivanič. 'Voice as *form*' is not personal in that it operates conformity with convention as given. 'Voice as *content*' is personal in that the writer uses the content of language to express her 'own ideas and beliefs'. It is the second type which 'authoritative writers' use in 'establishing an authorial presence in their texts' (1997: 151–152, their emphasis).

6. I am talking throughout this book about the genre which derives from in the English speaking West, while I am aware that there are sometimes considerable variations in the rest of the world, including continental Europe.

7. Golden-Biddle and Locke are speaking specifically about organizational studies; but they seem right in generalizing this to social science.

8. The use of 'naturalist' here, and 'progressive' later on, is mine, not theirs.

9. This 'we', which is the plural 'I' of both authors, is significantly different from the impersonal 'we' often used in more traditional writing to reduce the presence of the author by referring to the broad community of readers and writer or to create a sense of 'us-ness' with the reader (Clark and Ivanič 1997: 165).