



## Encapsulation in Student Writings: A Cross-Disciplinary Study

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### ABSTRACT

*The unity of texts and readers' textual interpretation is achieved through cohesive relations across sentence boundaries. Cohesive connections establish links that provide access to linguistic elements and activate information in the readers' memory. Encapsulation is a cohesive relation, which is very helpful in the text's development as it condenses and synthesizes textual segments such as sentences, sequences of sentences, and paragraphs. Thus, this study intends to investigate the frequency of encapsulator THIS and the syntactic and textual structures of encapsulated segments through THIS. This study also reports on the verbs used with encapsulator THIS. Hence, two corpora of papers from the Michigan Corpus of Upper-Level Student Paper written by Nursing and Biology students were selected. It encapsulates a variety of textual structures, including sentences, sentence chains, and paragraphs. The results also showed that encapsulated structures used verb forms with different functional processes. In addition, the results highlighted some disciplinary differences concerning encapsulation (frequencies and encapsulated structures) and verbs' functional processes used in encapsulation. The results of this study are directly applicable to the syllabus designed for writing academic genres.*

**KEYWORDS:** Biology; Disciplines; Encapsulation; Nursing; THIS; Verb

### INTRODUCTION

Writing is a core skill that benefits students across the curriculum, K-12 and beyond. It is the basis of communication, history, art, and disciplinary writing. Writing skills are used every day in classrooms, from the early practice of fine motor skills to writing complete essays to display critical thinking skills or persuasive skills. Writing is the foundation of expression students receive to be built upon throughout their academic careers. Although specialized writing classes such as composition have faded from popular pedagogy, writing requires a complex intersection of skills critical to a student's life, both in and outside of it. Many skills are involved in masterful writing performance, from students' organization of thoughts and critical thinking (Defazio, et al. 2010).

To write well, you must organize your thoughts, explain your argument, present your supporting evidence, and lead your reader to a shared conclusion. If the reader disagrees, they should be able to find each of your arguments for rebuttal. Writing enables you to recall past events vividly, describe a unique experience, or sell a vision. You rely on critical thinking in your conceptualization, clear articulation through the choice of words and structure, and effective sharing of information by writing for the reader, not just yourself. Writing can harness the transformative power of the written word to improve your life and change the world around you.

Any production that seeks to find facts, discover a part of knowledge and its dissemination among the people, solve a problem or express an idea in scientific subjects through a systematic study, and find social relations between natural phenomena has two characteristics of originality and innovation, leading to new applications, methods, concepts, and observations (Lamanauskas, 2020). Thus, in science, research that seeks to advance the frontiers of science and technology is considered scientific research. The primary audiences of such research are university professors and researchers working in scientific, research, and production centers (Moses & Mohamad, 2019).

Therefore, a scientific article is a written and published text describing the results of new research in an area of expertise. It can be said that researchers can share the results of their research with other researchers or scientists by publishing scientific articles. This study intends to investigate the frequency of encapsulator THIS and the syntactic and textual structure of encapsulated segments through THIS. The study also reports on the verbs used with encapsulator THIS.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Halliday and Hasan (1976) claim that some nouns are “superordinate members of major lexical sets, and therefore, their cohesive use is an instance of the general principle whereby a superordinate item operates anaphorically as a kind of synonym” (p. 275). Shell nouns or general nouns differ from other abstract nouns because they function as ‘shells’ that can hold detailed information in a particular context of use. Pairing the ‘verbal pointing’ function of demonstratives with the conceptual placeholder function of shell nouns provides opportunities for increased cohesion in texts as shell nouns can encapsulate the meaning of non-nominal antecedents in demonstrative structures.

Studies of shell nouns identify demonstratives followed by shell nouns as one of the predominant syntactic structures in which shell nouns occur (Aktas & Cortes, 2008; Schmid, 2000). Despite the research that has investigated unattended and attended this/these and the few studies investigating demonstratives together with shell nouns under varying terms (e.g., Charles, 2003), little research has considered the nature of the antecedent.

Swales (2005) notes important distributions of each type of use and describes elements of the linguistic context, such as grouping the nouns following determiners into semantic/functional groupings. However, his study pays little systematic attention to the specific antecedents of the demonstrative structures. Likewise, Gray (2006) identifies the types of nouns and verbs following the demonstratives but does not analyze the structures of antecedents. Furthermore, none of these studies considers how the demonstrative noun constructions are modified within the noun phrase, and noun phrase modification is an essential technique authors use to give additional, specifying information very concisely.

Cohesion is classically defined as where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. It is because of the demonstratives' referential function that the structures carry so much cohesive weight. The debate as to whether or not cohesion is achieved when demonstratives are used as pronouns rather than determiners is a question of clarity. As Quirk et al. (1985) point out, demonstratives may refer to a simple noun phrase, a clause, a sentence, or even a sequence of sentences. When a demonstrative is followed by a noun, that noun is the correct reference item, and the noun provides lexical cohesion.

Although numerous studies have investigated anaphoric reference or cohesion (e.g., Hinkel, 2001), very few have focused specifically on using demonstratives in anaphoric reference and concerning text cohesion. Furthermore, the available studies have focused primarily on the pronominal use of the existing prescriptive rules. Syntactic and demarcation reference is structural, according to which syntactic reference occurs whenever the antecedent can structurally be substituted for THIS, and demarcation reference occurs when the reference is apparent because it is limited by physical boundaries (i.e., paragraph breaks, quotation marks, or function words like but, yet, or moreover). Semantic reference, then, occurs when it is possible to determine the antecedent because the demonstrative structure can only logically refer to one of the primary elements given the meaning of the element and the remainder of the sentence in which the demonstrative structure occurs.

Furthermore, these studies focus primarily on pronominal THIS, and there is little (if any) attention to demonstrative determiners as a way of validating the prescriptive rules that have arisen. Although prescriptive rules call for using a demonstrative to eliminate referential ambiguity, there is only focus on whether or not having a noun following the demonstrative makes the message more straightforward.

While descriptive grammar has outlined the general frequencies and functions of demonstratives, there is a lack of details to understand how demonstratives contribute to communication fully. Additionally, most studies focus on the readers' reaction to demonstratives or the cognitive processing of such structures. What is missing in these grammatical descriptions and analyses of the cohesion of demonstrative pronouns and determiners is an in-depth investigation that more fully describes the linguistic environment in which they occur, as the linguistic environment may have a significant effect on how cohesive—or disruptive—demonstrative structures are for readers.

The results of a study by Padula et al. (2021) indicated that pronominal use of THIS accounted for over half of all the occurrences of THIS in the corpus. In contrast, previous studies found a much lower proportion. Gray and Cortes (2011) identified that pronominal use of THIS and THESE represented about one-fifth of the cases in their corpus of applied linguistics and engineering research articles. Wulff et al. (2012) found that the pronoun; THIS accounted for about two-fifths of their corpus of proficient student academic writing.

Not only was the pronominal use of THIS much higher in the corpus, but also in the initial position was markedly higher in the corpus of engineering semi-popularization articles. In the study by Padula et al. (2020), of the total number of cases with pronominal use, instances of THIS in the initial position represented about 59%, in contrast, previous studies found a much lower percentage of nearly 24% in Grabe's (2009) study of education and sociology research articles and around 35% in Swales's (2005) work on research articles from different disciplines. Their results on the syntactic characteristics of the textual segments encapsulated by THIS can contribute to the teaching of reading engineering semi-popularization articles.

As claimed by Grabe (2009) and Grabe and Stoller (2011), low-level skills such as the recognition of cohesive markers play a central role in the processing of linguistic information and thus require special attention and training in academic settings. In a study by Padula et al. (2020), the tendency of the pronoun THIS to encapsulate a previous sentence may be interpreted by the fact that semi-popularization articles communicate scientific and technological information to readers who are not specialists but have some level of proficiency and expertise in a specific area of knowledge (Muñoz, 2015). Therefore, the use of the pronoun THIS referring back to textual segments that do not exceed the limits of the sentence may be necessary to avoid forcing the reader to make an extra effort in tracking the antecedent in longer textual segments. The length of antecedents may influence the readers' perception of clarity for interpretation. The results have shed light on one particular cohesive phenomenon, encapsulation, as achieved by the pronoun THIS, and have helped advance the characterization of the semi-popularization article in English. Further research on the area could improve the description of encapsulation and the genre, leading to a better understanding of the resources used to achieve cohesion in scientific texts.

Wulff (2012) cautions that while analyses solidly confirm the strong verb-specific association with (un)attended THIS in terms of cause and effect, the verb need not necessarily be the first link in the chain driving the choice between attended and unattended THIS. Since the study did not consider the antecedents of THIS, it is not yet possible to rule out that the choice of verb is indeed a consequence of the writer's choice of (un)attended THIS, which ultimately depends more crucially on the nature of the noun phrase referent. In other words, it is conceivable that the choice for either attended or unattended; THIS is made before selecting the verb.

Based on Wulff (2012), the results gleaned from academic student writing with expert academic writing indicated that the exploration of the text-distributional characteristics of this-clusters, mainly motivated by the findings of the preceding quantitative analyses, could, in turn, be followed up by another more quantitatively-minded analysis, such as Poisson regression with the observed cluster frequencies as the dependent and textual position and verb as the independent variables.

Jiang and Wang (2018) studied the authorial practices of the sentence- THIS in 160 RAs across eight disciplines. In addition to the distribution of (un)attended THIS, verb types, and antecedents, they examined the functional activities of lexical verbs and the stance options of treating nouns. Similar to previous findings, roughly 35% of THIS was unattended in RAs, and antecedent referents of unattended THIS were overwhelmingly clausal, followed by extended discourse.

Recently, Jin (2019) compared (un)attended THIS/ THESE in lower- and higher-level US-based ESL placement test essays. Her findings indicate that higher-level students employ significantly more THIS/ THESE overall, with especially greater use of unattended THIS/ THESE.

While research shows excellent differences between general L2 English abilities and academic writing proficiency, researchers know very little about the use of (un)attended THIS/THESE in assessed source-based academic writing produced by matriculated ESL undergraduate students in US-based first-year composition (FYC) or the relationship between THIS/THESE and assessment of their writing in this context. Thus, limiting the analysis to short writing samples provides little guidance for FYC teachers in understanding matriculated ESL students' rhetorical practices or how best to serve their needs at the early stage of university education (Bychkovska & Lee, 2017).

Findings suggest that high-rated L2 writers construct a cohesive argument based on factual evidence, and, at the same time, take "a persuasive authorial stance on the content they discuss" (Jiang & Wang, 2018). They do this with their judicious use of unattended THIS/THESE, and more frequent employment of attended THIS/THESE followed by a more balanced selection of event and attribute nouns, especially with clausal and extended discourse referents, and lexical verbs. Thus, the careful deployment of (un)attended THIS/THESE seem to contribute to the positive assessment of their writing, as writing teachers may tacitly perceive their texts as being cohesively persuasive.

Approaching the analysis of (un)attended THIS/THESE from multiple perspectives allowed us to examine ESL undergraduate students' stylistic practices in great detail; however, there were a few methodological limitations. First, while all attempts were made to establish an even distribution of high- and low-rated papers, one must admit that the two groups were unbalanced. Furthermore, the dichotomization of continuous data could lead to the loss of some information, significantly the variance in the data set, which may influence the generalized ability of findings (Lee et al., 2021). Future research could compare more equal-sized groups across grade tiers using correlation or regression for accounting for variance in determining the extent to which proficiency affects students' use of THIS/THESE (Lee et al., 2021). An analysis such as this may lead to greater precision of results. It might be instructive for future research to examine the writing practices of students in a diversity of educational settings. Lee et al. (2021) examined source-based argumentative essays within FYC; however, there were differences between this study and others, maybe due to the writing context, writing task, time availability, topic familiarity, genre, and secondary source use. As Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) note, "demonstrative usage might be quite genre-specific in written discourse." Hence, future research could use a balanced corpus of a range of student genres across proficiency levels in various rhetorical situations to determine whether it is proficiency or rhetorical situation, or a combination of these variables, influencing students' use of demonstratives in their writing. The general questions of the study are as follows:

- 1) What are the functions of THIS in articles written by Biology and Nursing students?
- 2) What are the references of THIS in articles written by Biology and Nursing students?
- 3) What are the commonly used verbs with THIS in articles written by Biology and Nursing students?

## METHODOLOGY

### CORPUS

The data in this study were extracted from the Michigan Corpus of Upper-Level Student papers (MICUSP corpus). We examined THIS in terms of application in Biology and Nursing. A total of 109 articles in Biology and Nursing were reviewed. 67 articles in Biology and 42 articles in Nursing.

Table1. *Features of corpus*

Disciplines	Papers	Types of papers	Number	Total word count
Biology	67 papers	Argumentative Essays	3	185375
		Proposal	5	
		Report	32	
		Research paper	27	
Nursing	42 papers	Argumentative Essays	6	180584
		Proposal	5	
		Report	28	
		Research paper	3	

## DATA ANALYSIS

First, the data were scanned for the realizations of THIS, and checked for being pronoun or determiner. Second, the determiners THIS were checked for the encapsulated structures such as phrase(s), clause(s), or sentence (s). In the third step, the verbs used with THIS were checked for tenses (present, past, and future), aspects (passive and active), and functions. Functions included: a) Activity verbs concerned with what people do (*give, build, perform*); b) Communication verbs related to communication activities like speaking and writing (*describe, debate, argue*); c) Mental verbs describing cognitive activities (*believe, understand, study*); d) Verbs of existence or relationship between entities (*represent, link, relate*); e) Verbs of facilitation (*allow, need*); f) Verbs of simple occurrence (*develop, grow, increase*); and g) Aspectual verbs denoting the stage of progress of activities (*keep, continue, hold*). Finally, the findings are tabulated and discussed.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented and discussed to answer the research questions raised in this study. The corpus was analyzed as shown in Table 2 to answer research question 1: What are the functions of THIS in papers written by Biology and Nursing students?

Table 2: *Functions of THIS in Nursing and Biology papers*

Disciplines	Function	Frequency	Word count	Per 1000 words
Biology	Pronoun	732	185375	1.44
	Pronoun (Object)	11		0.05
	Pronoun (Subject)	86		0.46
	Determiner	267		3.94
	Determiner (Object)	42		0.22
	Determiner (Subject)	122		0.65
	Total	1260		6.79
Nursing	Pronoun	281	180584	1.55
	Pronoun (Object)	34		0.18
	Pronoun (Subject)	74		0.39
	Determiner	786		4.35
	Determiner (Object)	55		0.29
	Determiner (Subject)	99		0.53
	Total	1329		7.32

The results in Table 2 indicate that THIS (Example 1) is an essential linguistic feature worth investigating. This result highlights the importance of THIS, proposed by Romer and Wulff (2010). This result is also in line with the results reported in studies by Jiang and Wang (2018) and Padula et al. (2020). The results could be discussed based on the fact that one way of reaching cohesion in discourse is through using the pronoun THIS.

Example 1: This constitutes one of the few sympatric speciation.

The results in Table 2 indicate that THIS was more frequent in Nursing papers than in Biology papers concerning the determiner function (Example 2). Greater use of this function compared to the function as a pronoun (Example 3) is in line with the findings reported by Gray (2011) and Swales (2005). They found that about three-quarters of the pronoun, THIS included functioning determiners. The similarity could source from the fact that these studies

investigated academic writings. It seems that such a use could stress that the nature of academic writings imposes such use of the pronoun THIS.

Example 2: This study is a good example of a physiological difference between men and women that cause women to experience a more negative impact in response to stress; men do not have to deal with the hormonal fluctuations that are associated with the menstrual cycle nor do they bear children, while women do have to worry about these issues.

Example 3: Many people think of plague as an extinct disease of the middle age, a horrifying tale from history class that has been eliminated from society through time and technology. Of course, this is not a case.

The corpus was analyzed as shown by Table 3 to answer research question 2: What are the references of THIS in articles written by Biology and nursing students?

Table 3: *Frequencies of reference items of THIS*

Discipline	Reference Item	Frequency	Word count	Per 1000 words
Biology	Sentence	624	185375	3.36
	Clause	221		1.19
	Whole text	99		0.53
	Total	944		5.09
Nursing	Sentence	506	180584	2.80
	Clause	227		1.25
	Whole text	165		0.913
	Total	898		4.97

Table 3 suggest that most of the pronouns THIS were used to refer to or encapsulate sentences (example 4) or clauses (example 5), and other items such as noun-phrase and paragraphs or whole text did not receive noticeable attention. This result is in line with the findings suggested by Padula et al. (2020), Gray (2006), and Alvarez de Mony Rego (1990).

Example 4: This study is a good example of a psychological difference between men and women that cause a woman to experience a more negative impact and response to stress.

Example 5: Therefore, it is detrimental to have a good and thorough understanding of how women's bodies function differently from men's; this will allow for better therapeutic outcomes in medicine to correct or improve each individual woman's health conditions.

The results concerning the reference of THIS indicate that its textual reference does not exceed the sentence boundaries. The reference was mainly to the sentence or clause. The reference of THIS to syntactic structures revealed some interesting results indicating that THIS aimed to create cohesion at the sentence level since the reference was mainly to the sentence followed by the clause. As the academic writing corpus analyzed in this study belonged to undergraduate writings, writers preferred not to force the readers to seek references in long textual structures. Geisler et al. (1985) also stated that the antecedent length might influence the readers' interpretations of the text. Our study could extend the findings of earlier studies to include academic writing of two disciplines of Nursing and Biology.

The corpus was analyzed in Table 4 to answer research question 3: What are the commonly used verbs with THIS in articles written by Biology and Nursing students?

Table 4: *Tenses of verbs used with THIS*

Discipline	Tense	Frequency	Word count	Per 1000 words
Biology	Simple Present	469	185375	2.53
	Simple Past	330		1.78
	Simple future	145		0.78
	Present Perfect	370		1.99
	Total	1314	185375	7.08
	Nursing	Simple Present	630	180584
Simple Past		580		3.21
Simple future		467		2.58
Present Perfect		505		2.79
Total		2182	180584	11.70

The results concerning tenses of verbs used with THIS showed that simple present outnumbered others and simple past came second in both sets of articles. The least used was related to the present perfect (Example 6-8). This result is in line with the findings reported by Author (2018).

Example 6: Kane (2004) suggests that the reason for this is due to several factors.

Example 7: There was not a quantitative aspect to this study that measured documentation content. (Simple past)

Example 8: Two explanations have been proposed for this observation.

This result can be discussed because writers mostly report research actions and procedures, present results, and discuss them in article writing. These two presentations need simple past and simple present tenses. Present perfect could represent that writers link their studies to earlier studies in the literature.

The third question was answered concerning the aspects of verbs used with THIS, and the results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: *Aspects of verbs used with THIS*

	Aspect	Frequency	Word count	Per 1000 words
Biology	Active	578	185375	3.11
	Passive	82		0.44
	Total	660	185375	2.74
Nursing	Active	430	180584	2.38
	Passive	66		0.36
	Total	496	180584	2.74

The results in Table 5 suggest that the frequent aspect is active, and the passive aspect was one-fourth of THIS structure (Example 9-10).

Example 9: This paper will propose a model to evaluate the effectiveness of standardized nursing terminologies in electronic medical records in decreasing the occurrence of these errors and improving patient outcomes by improving communication between caregivers.

Example 10: This is illustrated by the fact that the confidence intervals in the linear regression graphs are broadly overlapping.

This result is in line with Author (2018) and Author (2017). It is worth noting that the passive aspect is not a norm in academic writing, and active sentences are much easier to understand. This may be because active verbs express the meaning more emphatically and vigorously than passive verbs, which lack strength as their subject receives the action instead of doing it. The little attention to the passive is probably because writers sometimes prefer to make the action bolder than the doer of the action in academic writings.

The two sets of articles were analyzed, as shown in Table 6, to answer research question 3 concerning the functions of verbs.

Table 6: *Frequencies of functions of verbs*

Function of verb	Biology		Nursing	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Communication	93	23.60%	73	22.18%
Activity	93	23.60%	73	22.18%
Existence	70	17.70%	61	18.51%
Mental	58	14.72%	49	14.89%
Facilitation or causation	41	10.40%	37	11.24%
Occurrence reporting	30	7.61%	26	7.90%
Spatial	9	2.28%	10	3.03%

The results in Table 6 indicate that writers of articles in both disciplines showed similar tendencies towards using different types of verbs. The most common verbs used with THIS were “activity” and “communicative” functions (Examples 11-14).

Example 11: Study contained a disproportionate number of racial ethnic minorities, which does not allow the reader to make any generalization for any ethnic group (Allsworth, 2007). (Communication verb in Nursing)

Example 12: This needs to be closely monitored because of the scleroderma. (Activity verb in Nursing).

Example 13: Particularly important species in this family are *Onychomys* sp., the grasshopper mice, *Peromyscus maniculatus* the deer mice, and *Microtus* sp., the meadow voles. Grasshopper mice are carnivorous, feeding on anything from insects to other mice. (Communication verb in Biology)

Example 14: This does not occur in animal sperm. Secondly {2}, the XY type sex determination in animals has led to very genetically sparse Y-type chromosome. (Activity verb in Bio)

The results are in line with Author (2018). The use of verbs to show the “activity” function could indicate that the articles reported what was done in the experiment in these two disciplines. The second common function was “communication,” showing the necessity of communicating and notifying the experiment. This is quite usual in articles, which becomes more evident when it comes to experiment-based disciplines such as Biology and Nursing.

Next on the list were “mental” and “existence/ relational” (Examples 15-18).

Example 15: This has been a large contributing factor for the clinical unit to begin piloting a new wound documentation form to help with a more precise and accurate description of a patient’s wounds and treatment. (Mental in Nursing)

Example 16: Further data needs to be researched towards proper documentation, but this research is in the process of being conducted. (Existence verb in Nursing)

Example 17: The theoretical reasoning behind the detection of the bottleneck lies in a mathematical function known as a Laplace transformation (Kimmel, 1999), while the actual workings of this function are unimportant. (Mental in Biology)

Example 18: This date being based on fossil evidence. (Existence in Biology)

“Mental” function plays an essential role in articles describing cognitive status and activities. Verbs such as consider, design, study, and investigate are required when presenting aims, methods, arguments, or claims in articles.



Writers mainly used verbs to show “existential or relational” functions to communicate and clarify the relationships between essential issues in the article. Other functions have received little attention.

### CONCLUSION

This study examined how often THIS and THESE were used in sentences, finding that the determining factors were in the sentence. Besides, THIS and THESE were used in applied, technical, and engineering cases, often as a determinant in noun phrases. Given the inherent nature of these pronouns, the study is empirical. It is noteworthy that these pronouns contribute as determinants, but they have the same ratio of the types of nouns and perform the same functions. Combined with a determiner, they have a special meaning, and our findings may reflect a slightly different nature. The results show that among the functions in this study, (Determiner and Pronoun) in Biology and Nursing, the most and most minor used functions were related to Determiner in Nursing and Pronoun in Biology, respectively. Comparing the results obtained from the reference items in this study (Sentence and Clause), the highest and lowest reference items available and used were sentence and whole text, and Sentence was about three times Clause. The results of the present study indicate that the most commonly used verb in the field of Biology and Nursing was related to the simple present verb. The least frequently used verbs in Biology and Nursing were Aspectual verbs. According to the results of the present study, the pronoun THIS as Encapsulator in Nursing was more than in Biology. The study has implications for the educational community. The results can assist lesson planners and instructors in teaching writing while helping learners in the writing section to define goals, identify problems, and arrive at solutions. Also, correct writing can be practical and valuable in their academic and professional success.

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