

# The role of 'this' in English academic and research writing

HKU Constituent Theme  
Languages, Media & Communication:  
Language in Education & Assessment Seminar Series

## Speaker

Professor John Swales

The University of Michigan

(Chair: Mr Nigel Bruce, English Centre, HKU)



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## Abstract

Anaphoric (backwards-pointing) uses of *this* occur frequently in academic and research prose—around six times per 1000 words on average. In this talk, I discuss the problematics of this little word, particularly whether the demonstrative needs to be followed by a suitable noun phrase. (In other words, whether the *this* should be “attended” or “supported”.) This is followed by a review of my struggles to deal with this common demonstrative in academic writing materials going back to 1971. In an attempt to put more facts on the ground, I then investigate *this* in an electronic corpus drawn from ten different disciplines. Although there are interesting disciplinary differences, it turns out that overall about a third of clause-initial occurrences of *this* are unattended, or have no associated nominal. Finally, I discuss the conditions under which unattended *this* is permissible, and the pedagogical consequences.

**Professor John Swales** is Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at the University of Michigan, where he was also Director of the English Language Institute from 1985 to 2001. He has been the faculty advisor for the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) project since its inception in 1997. He has published three major monographs: *Genre Analysis* (1990), *Other Floors, Other Voices* (1998) and *Research Genres* (2004), and two textbooks (with Chris Feak) that many regard as the best ever written for advanced EAP learners: *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (2nd ed. 2000) and *English in Today's Research World* (2000). Professor Swales' principal research interest lies in written discourse, particularly academic and research writing. Associated interests involve genre theory, methods of discourse analysis, English for Academic Purposes, and comparative rhetoric.

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All are Welcome. Enquiries: 2859 2395