"Keep it simple": the introductions of Veterinary Medicine academic papers[1]

"Keep it simple": as introduções de artigos acadêmicos de Medicina Veterinária

Amanda Petry Radünz[2]
Universidade Federal de Santa Maria
amanda.radunz@outlook.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4382-5235

Sara Regina Scotta Cabral[3]
Universidade Federal de Santa Maria
sara.scotta.cabral@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0303-0737

Abstract: This study investigates the linguistic organization of the introduction sections of academic papers from the Veterinary Medicine field in terms of the two basic systems that determine how one clause is related to another: taxis (degree of interdependency) and logico-semantic relation (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 438). All the clauses from the introduction sections of five published academic papers were analyzed. The results showed a high recurrence of simple clauses and embedded clauses in the *corpus*. In the clause complexes, the preference is for paratactic extensions. The results of this analysis may help understanding the functioning of academic writing in English language in this specific field.

Keywords: clause complex; Veterinary Medicine; academic writing.

Resumo: Este estudo investiga a organização linguística das seções de introdução de artigos acadêmicos da área da Medicina Veterinária nos termos dos dois sistemas básicos que determinam como uma oração se relaciona com a outra: taxis (grau de interdependência) e relação lógico-semântica (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 438). Todas as orações das seções de introdução de cinco artigos acadêmicos publicados foram analisadas. Os resultados mostraram uma alta recorrência de orações simples e orações encaixadas no *corpus*. Nos complexos oracionais, a preferência é por

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extensões paratáticas. Os resultados desta análise podem ajudar a entender o funcionamento da escrita acadêmica em língua inglesa nessa área específica.

Palavras-chave: complexo oracional; Medicina Veterinária; escrita acadêmica.

Introduction

Academic writing is considered a highly valued skill among the members of the scientific community, as the most effective way of reporting research results among peers. This process of publication is preferably conducted in English, recognized as the *lingua franca* of science (Hülmbauer et al., 2008), making the access to research developed in different countries easier, and, therefore, contributing to the internationalization of higher education institutions (HEI) (Morosini, 2011).

Publishing in English is, in this context, one of the ways for graduate programs to achieve international impact, which, in Brazilian HEI, improves the programs' classification in rankings and the number of resources available for research (Finardi; Furtado Guimarães, 2017, p. 618). In the Federal University of Santa Maria (FUSM)[4], for instance, the Chemistry and the Veterinary Medicine Graduate Programs excel at publishing in English (Lee, 2019, p. 81), both classified with the best grade in the graduate programs' national evaluation by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES).

In this scenario, the need of providing graduate students with opportunities to improve their proficiency in English and to practice academic writing in this language is evident (Dantas-Lunn; Ferreira, 2019, p. 68), given that, even in these highly rated programs, professors and students report struggling to write in English (Lee, 2019, p. 126-127). This struggle may be related to the lack of tradition of teaching academic writing as a regular course in Brazilian HEI (Ferreira; Lousada, 2016, p. 126). In FUSM, among the 35 doctoral degree graduate programs, only nine offer mandatory courses that explicitly explore academic writing along with other topics, two of which explore writing-to-publish as the main topic[5].

Fortunately, due to long term research that have been carried out in Applied Linguistics (Lea; Street, 1998; Swales, 1998a, 1998b; Hyland, 2008; Motta-Roth, 2009; Marinho, 2010; Ferreira; Lousada, 2016; Navarro, 2019, to mention a few), student-oriented academic writing teaching actions that were already in progress in Brazil, such as the offer of courses on academic writing for specific disciplines in the scope of graduate programs and of the Languages Without Borders program[6], are increasing. One example is the rising number of Academic Literacies Laboratories, or Writing Centers: in 2016, Cristovão and Vieira (2016, p. 213, 217) identified five HEI in Brazil hosting reading and

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[4] Institution that hosts the present research.
[5] Mapping carried out in 2021.
[6] https://www.andifes.org.br/?page_id=82328.

writing specific centers, while in 2021, at least 14 centers on this scope participated in the first and second editions of the Academic Conversations Circle[7].

The establishment of academic writing centers like these ones represent the offer of "integral services, providing the primary source of writing assistance" for 'regular' writing courses, providing individualized or group help for the writing of any academic genre of interest (Harris, 1988, p. 2). These centers also contribute to the investigation of how language works in specific contexts through genre-based approaches (Hyland, 2008; Motta-Roth, 2009; Navarro, 2019), which investigate academic writing in a more-regularized way, interview and observe participants in communities of practice, and perform an ethnographic documentation on how texts are used in this organization (Bazerman, 2004, p. 321-322), that is, understanding that writing "is always a social practice, influenced by cultural and institutional contexts" (Hyland, 2008, p. 561).

Located in the scope of the aforementioned actions on behalf of academic writing teaching in Brazilian HEI, the objective of this paper is to investigate the linguistic organization of the introduction sections of academic papers from the Veterinary Medicine field in terms of the two basic systems that determine how one clause is related to another: taxis (degree of interdependency) and logico-semantic relation (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 438). This investigation represents a small portion of an ongoing doctoral research in Applied Linguistics that investigates the teaching of academic writing in English in the Veterinary Medicine Graduate Program (VMGP), in FUSM.

The research uses theoretical and methodological assumptions related to textography (Swales, 1998a, 1998b), including observation of classes, meetings, and laboratory working; application of questionnaires and interviews; and linguistic analysis of academic texts. The results of this latter procedure, focus of the present paper, may give an overview on how language works in this specific field, and, later, support the teaching of academic writing in English that already takes place in FUSM-VMGP, in a specific discipline on Scientific Research Methodology. The next section presents a brief background on the theoretical framework used to carry out the linguistic analysis.

Types of relationship between clauses: taxis and logico-semantic relation

One possible way of analyzing the relationship between clauses is through the systems of taxis and logico-semantic relation, as it was proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 438). The first system, taxis, establishes the degree of interdependency of two clauses linked by a logico-semantic relation (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 438). That is, two clauses that are linked to each other may be "treated as being of equal status" when they "are potentially independent of one another" (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 438). This kind of relation is called **parataxis** – where one clause is the initiating and the other the continuing (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 440). On the other hand, two clauses that are linked to each other "may be treated as being of unequal status" when only one of them can "stand on its own", being the dominant clause, and the other, the dependent clause (Halliday; Matthiessen,

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[7] https://sites.google.com/view/lilaparana/eventos/ii-roca-lila-llac?authuser=0.

2014, p. 440). This kind of relation is called **hypotaxis**. The parataxis system is represented by numerical notations, that is, the initiating clause is represented as "1", and the continuing as "2"; and the hypotaxis system is represented by the Greek letter notation, that is, the dominant clause is represented as "α", and the dependent as "β" (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 441). In the case of hypotaxis, the dominant clause can be positioned before or after the dependent one; in parataxis, on the other hand, the initiating clause is always the first one, and the second is the continuing.

The second system, the logico-semantic relation, establishes the kind of relation that links two clauses. The relation may be established through **expansion**, when "the secondary clause expands the primary clause, by (a) elaborating it, (b) extending it or (c) enhancing it"; or through **projection**, when "the secondary clause is projected through the primary clause, which instates it as (a) a locution or (b) an idea" (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 443). The authors (2014, p. 444) represent and define these systems as follows (Charts 1 and 2).

Chart 1. Ways of representing expansion and projection systems

(1) Expansion:	(2) Projection:
(a) elaborating = (equals) (b) extending + (is added to) (c) enhancing x (is multiplied by)	(a) locution " (double quotes) (b) idea ' (single quotes)

Source: Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 444)

Chart 2. Defining expansion and projection categories

EXPANSION	Elaborating	one clause restates the other in other words, specify it in greater detail, comment it, or exemplify it.
	Extending	one clause adds some new element to the other, gives and exception to it, or offers an alternative.
	Enhancing	one clause qualifies the other with some circumstantial feature of time, place, cause, or condition.
PROJECTION	Locution	one clause presents the other as a locution, a construction of wording.
	Idea	one clause presents the other as an idea, a construction of meaning.

Source: Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 444)

To conclude, Chart 3 summarizes the systems of taxis and logico-semantic relation.

Chart 3. The system of taxis and logico-semantic relation

TAXIS		LOGICO-SEMANTIC RELATION	
Hypotaxis	Parataxis	Expansion	Projection
α β	1 2	= elaborating (i.e., e.g., viz.) +	" locution (says)

dominant and dependent	initiating and continuing	extending (and, or)	' idea (thinks)
		x enhancing (so, yet, then)	

Source: Halliday and Matthiessen (2014)

Besides the systems of taxis and logico-semantic relation, the constituents of one clause may relate to another through the system of **embedding**. This system is highly explored in the academic language, which presents several definitions of technical terms and needs to be as clear as possible. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 490-491) explain that "whereas parataxis and hypotaxis are relations between clauses, (…) embedding is a semogenic mechanism whereby a clause or phrase comes to function as a constituent within the structure of a group, which itself is a constituent of a clause". The embedded clauses are represented as "[[ ]]". Embedded clauses may function as a Postmodifier in a nominal group, which is its most common function, and may also function as the head of a nominal group or as a Postmodifier in and adverbial group (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 491-492). All those categories were used to carry out the methodological procedures adopted in the analysis, described in the next section.

Methodological procedures

As a sample of the Veterinary Medicine field in FUSM, the research's universe of analysis is the institution's Veterinary Medicine's Virology Sector (VS-FUSM). This group noticeably publishes in English - 77% of the papers published by the group, among the ones disclosed in their website, are written in this language. Besides, the group carries a strong tradition inside the institution, established in 1983, only 20 years after FUSM, approximately. The group's members range from scientific initiation, residence, master's and doctoral students and professors. This study was approved by FUSM's Research Ethics Committee (Nº 31219820.2.0000.5346), in May 2020.

As a first step towards understanding how this group uses the English language to report their research results, five articles published by them were selected for the present analysis. The first selected *corpus* was collected in the group's website, in which they disclose their published academic papers. In the moment of the data collection (August 2021), the three most recent academic papers disclosed dated 2019. Of these, two were samples of the academic paper genre, and, therefore, those two were the selected ones. The second selected *corpus* was collected in the group's coordinator's curriculum webpage, in which the three most recent published academic papers were selected, totaling five samples. Inside these articles, only the introduction sections were considered for the analysis. The five academic papers that compose the *corpus* received a code, composed by the initials "AP", followed by the symbol "#" and numbered 1-5.

The analytical procedures carried out in the five introduction sections were the following:

1- identification of the clauses that compose each section;

2- manual analysis of the clauses, in order to identify the simple clauses, the embedded clauses and the clause complexes;

3- manual analysis of the embedded clauses, in order to classify them in terms of expansion (elaborating, extending or enhancing) and projection (locution or idea); and

4- manual analysis of the clause complexes, in order to classify them in terms of parataxis and hypotaxis, and in terms of expansion (elaborating, extending or enhancing) and projection (locution or idea).

To represent the beginning and end of each clause in the complex, the pattern of symbols adopted were the ones suggested by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), which are:

||| - beginning and end of the clause complex

|| - boundary between two clauses

The next section presents the results and discussion on the analysis of the linguistic occurrences found in the *corpus*.

Results and discussion

The introduction sections selected for the present analysis compose five academic papers that are organized in five sections each. Chart 4 presents the organization of these academic papers in terms of sections.

Chart 4. The organization of the academic papers

	AP#1	AP#2	AP#3	AP#4	AP#5
Abstract	300 words	180 words	228 words	265 words	250 words
Introduction	543 words	489 words	395 words	586 words	614 words
Methods	460 words	383 words	390 words	1232 words	558 words
Results	430 words	401 words	915 words	760 words	955 words
Discussion	1389 words	830 words	-	1579 words	1080 words
Tables	03	01	02	02	01
Figures	02	03	01	05	03
Totals	09 pages 3122 words	07 pages 2283 words	05 pages 1928 words	08 pages 4422 words	10 pages 3457 words

Source: Authors.

One interesting fact that can be highlighted concerning the organization of the academic papers is that none of them present a specific section for reviewing the literature. It is a relevant fact because the references for previous research are presented in the Introduction section, focus of the present

analysis. In all papers, the Discussion section is the biggest one (in AP#3, it is presented in the Results section). In general, the Introduction section is the second biggest one, considering the number of words. It is also interesting to highlight that the Methods and Results sections, in general, although presenting a reduced number of words, gather the tables and figures of the academic papers, which present very dense information. The reduced size of the Methods section may be related to the changes of scientists' behavior and needs, who, in many cases, would only read it in case they could not understand the procedures through the reading of the other sections, or in case they wish to replicate the methods (Berkenkotter; Huckin, 1995, p. 28-29).

The introduction sections, in turn, "introduces a written or spoken academic action" (Bhatia, 2004, p 66), an essential communicative objective for any academic register. The manual analysis of their clauses showed that the number of simple and embedded clauses and clause complexes can be considered balanced. Chart 5 presents the number of clause relations found in the *corpus*.

Chart 5. Amount of clause relations in the corpus

	AP#1	AP#2	AP#3	AP#4	AP#5
Simple clauses	07	10	09	08	14
Embedded clauses	11	14	09	09	15
Clause complexes	12	07	07	11	13

Source: Authors.

Two examples of these occurrences in the introduction section are presented next.

1) Simple clause:

AP#3
||| The porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome virus (PRRSV) **is** a globally important pathogen of economic concern. |||
AP#5
||| In South America, the hematophagous bats Desmodus rotundus **are** the main reservoirs and sources of RABV to herbivorous [18]. |||

2) Embedded clause:

AP#1
||| Canine parvovirus 2 (CPV-2) **is** the etiological agent of a highly transmissible, frequently severe gastroenteric disease of dogs [[**distributed** worldwide]] [1]. |||
AP#4
||| Contagious ecthyma, or Orf, **is** a contagious disease of sheep and goats [[that occasionally **causes** occupational infections in humans (Fleming S. B., 2007).]] |||

3) Clause complex:

AP#2

||| At least 22 subgenotypes (1a–1u) **have been identified** for BVDV-1, || whereas four **have been described** for BVDV-2 (2a–2d). |||

AP#3

||| In South America, some countries (Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Guyana, French Guiana and Suriname) **have** never **reported** PRRSV in swine herds to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), || whereas in Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, Uruguay and Venezuela the viral infection **has been described**. |||

The first linguistic recurrence of the *corpus* to be highlighted is the high number of simple clauses, which can lead to the interpretation that much information in the introduction section is not detailed, commented, exemplified, compared, or qualified. That is, in the introduction section, much information is simply given to the reader, who must make the necessary connections with previous research. This is also confirmed by the lack of verbal processes[8], and, therefore, projections in this section of the academic papers. Among the clause complexes found in the *corpus*, no occurrence of projection was found.

This result can be compared to the results found by Fuzer (2012, p. 485) in an analysis carried out in the Engineering field: the number of verbal processes was also considered low, compared to the number of words of the academic papers analyzed, which, according to the author, "can represent the more procedural than dialogical profile of the Engineering filed"[9]. In a similar way, in the *corpus* of the present analysis, previous studies are cited through the number reference system, in which a number is added in a square bracket after the citation, and the bibliography of the work is arranged by the order in which the citations appear in the text. This referencing style, known as the Vancouver style, is highly used in the medical area, and was established for the scientific reports to be structured in an "accurate, clear, accessible and uniform way"[10] (Rother; Braga, 2004, p. 692). That way, authors are not mentioned in the text, therefore, verbal processes are not needed.

The use of this references style may also be related to the hard sciences' preference of not presenting extensive reference to previous research, considering that it is easier "to assume a shared context with readers" in this area than it is in social and human sciences (Hyland, 2008, p. 552-553). Consequently, the hard sciences' academic papers draw on processes that refer to the research itself, that is, to actions in the real world, while in the human and social sciences the processes related to verbal activities are more recurrent (Hyland, 2008, p. 553).

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[8] The processes located clauses in time, and "are realized by a verb marked for 'present' tense, contrasting with 'past' meant and 'future' will mean". The verbal processes, in turn, represent the "symbolic relationships constructed in human consciousness and enacted in the form of language, like saying and meaning" (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 212, 215).

[9] Authors' translation. In the original: "*pode representar o perfil mais procedimental do que dialógico da área da Engenharia*" (Fuzer, 2012, p. 485).

[10] Authors' translation. In the original: "de forma mais precisa, clara, acessível e uniforme" (Rother; Braga, 2004, p. 692).

This lack of connections between the research being reported with previous ones and the high occurrence of simple clauses in the introduction section may also be related to the functioning of the field, which prioritizes the discussion of the analysis carried out – the extent of this section in the academic papers also shows that. It can also be related to the functioning of the academic paper genre itself, not only in Veterinary Medicine, but in general, which seems to prioritize the methods and discussion of the results. Among the genre patterns discussed by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995, p. 38), contextual information that locate the study in its field and relate it to previous research "is being published more and more in the form of review articles", or "mini-reviews" (a version of the review article genre with a faster flow of publishing), instead of in academic papers. (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995, p. 38). In the same direction, in an analysis of the conjunction system in one sample of this genre, Vian Jr. and Mendes (2015, p. 173-174) found that there is a small number of conjunctions when compared to other academic genres, such as undergraduate final paper, master's thesis and doctoral dissertation. Furthermore, these authors also found that there is also a higher number of citations to previous studies with a smaller (re)analysis of the content presented in these texts.

Although there is this high recurrence of simple clauses in the *corpus*, the analysis showed that some clauses may not be that simple. Among the simple clauses in AP#1, AP#2, and AP#5, more than half are accompanied by embedded clauses. They were also found in AP#3 and AP#4, in a lower number. Most of the embedded clauses found in the *corpus* function as Postmodifiers in nominal groups and can be classified as elaborations in the expansion system, in which their meaning "is essentially to define, delimit or specify" (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 493), as the following examples demonstrate.

AP#1
||| Between 1978 and 1981, CPV **underwent** rapid changes [[that eventually **gave rise** to variants CPV-2a and 2b [1, 7].]] |||
AP#2
||| The pestivirus genome **is** a 12.3-kb RNA molecule [[that **contains** a long open reading frame (ORF) [[**flanked** by two untranslated regions, 5′ and 3′ UTRs.]]]] |||

In the first example (from AP#1), the embedded clause is the Postmodifier of the nominal group "rapid changes", that is, the clause "that eventually gave rise to variants CPV-2a and 2b" refers exclusively to this nominal group, and not to the whole previous sentence. This clause is functioning as a further definition of these changes. The second example (from AP#2) demonstrates a simple clause with two embedded clauses: the first is the Postmodifier of "12.3-kb RNA molecule", and the second is the Postmodifier of "a long open reading frame (ORF)", both serving to further define these nominal groups. This high recurrence of embedded clauses demonstrates the density and technicity of academic language, that is, the necessity of mentioning technical terms that must be further detailed.

Lastly, although the analysis also showed a high recurrence of clause complexes, most of them are complexes between only two clauses. In all the introduction sections, only less than 20% of the

clause complexes establish relations among more than two clauses (except for AP#2, in which this recurrence is of 40%). This also confirms the hypothesis that this field prioritizes a simple language to make reading easier. The kind of relation that occurs the most in the *corpus* is the paratactic extension, exemplified by the following example.

AP#2
||| The first evidence of circulation of HoBiPeV in Brazil **dates** from around 2002 || and a number of subsequent studies **indicate** [[that these viruses **are** endemic among Brazilian cattle [7, 14, 15, 24, 25, 27, 29–31].]] |||

In this clause complex, represented as 1^+2[[ ]], one piece of information is simply added to the other through a paratactic extension, representing an additive-positive relation. The other paratactic extension relations found in the *corpus*, in lower occurrences, are alternation, in which one clause is presented as an alternative to another, additive-adversative, in which on clause is presented as an adverse idea to another, and variation-subtractive, in which one clause is presented as a total or partial replacement of another (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 472-474). The high recurrences of paratactic extensions demonstrate that the authors are worried about presenting additional information concerning specific issues, maybe the most relevant ones. However, the number of clauses that establish this kind of relation is lower than the number of simple clauses, as it was previously pointed out. Besides, the additive-positive relations can be considered very simple relations to be established, being even possible to re-organize the message in two simple clauses:

||| The first evidence of circulation of HoBiPeV in Brazil **dates** from around 2002. ||| A number of subsequent studies **indicate** [[that these viruses **are** endemic among Brazilian cattle [7, 14, 15, 24, 25, 27, 29–31].]] |||

The second kind of relation highlighted in the *corpus* is the hypotatic elaboration, exemplified by the following example.

AP#1
||| Since then, the new variant (CPV-2c) **has been** progressively **detected** in dog populations worldwide, || [**detected**] including in Brazil, || where it **affects** both young and adult dogs, || **vaccinated** or not [9, 10]. |||

This clause complex is composed of three hypotatic elaborations, represented as α^=β(α^=β(α^=β)). This means that the sentence "[detected] including in Brazil" brings a background information, or a characterization of "worldwide", an important aspect of the dominant clause (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 464). The same is applied for the complex "where it affects both young and adult dogs, || vaccinated or not", which characterizes "Brazil", and in the sentence

"vaccinated or not", which characterizes "both young and adult dogs". Just as the high occurrences of embedded clauses functioning as Postmodifiers of nominal groups, this result indicates the need for further explanation of specific terms in the academic discourse.

The analysis of the linguistic organization of the introduction sections of these academic papers in terms of the systems of taxis and logico-semantic relation demonstrated that in general, these academic papers prioritize simple clauses and a language that is "right to the point". This means that, if the reader needs further explanation, they must look for it by themselves. In the case of clause complexes, they are mostly in the direct order (in hypotatic relations, the dominant clause is usually followed by the dependent one), with very few cases of enclosure (when a clause is positioned differently from what is expected by the canonical structure). This result may be related to the researchers' needs, who benefits from reading quickly and efficiently to deal with the large amount of information that is daily available (Berkenkotter; Huckin, 1995, p. 39).

This result was also confirmed by an insider informant, expert in the Veterinary Medicine discipline with a high index of publications in the field, coordinator of the group under analysis by the present research. In an interview conducted in November 2021, the informant mentioned that

"*We try to make it in a way that makes the paper the most digestible for the reader (…). The more 'ks', two letters that I use a lot: 'keep it simple' (…), because it has been demonstrated that (…) more cohesive papers are much more read, much more cited and so on.*"[11]

In this context, a similar analysis on the other sections of the academic papers in the field would be useful to confirm this preference of simple clauses in the field of Veterinary Medicine. Some additional final remarks are presented in the next section.

Final remarks

The results of the presented analysis may be useful for the ongoing doctoral research from which it is part of, which aims at contributing to the members of the Veterinary Medicine field in FUSM in their academic writing performance in English. It is a relevant research considering that, although the group develops several academic practices in English language, the first survey conducted with 10 participants and the interview conducted with the group's coordinator showed that most of them do not write in the English language, which confirms the need of offering more opportunities of practicing academic writing and English for Academic Purposes.

In this context, this analysis of introductions sections of academic papers published in English language by the group demonstrated glances on the preferences of expert researchers on the filed in terms of writing in this community. These results may be confirmed through further analysis and then

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[11] Authors' translation. In the original: "*A gente procura fazer da forma que torne o artigo mais digerível pelo possível leitor (…). Quanto mais 'ks', duas letras que eu utilizo muito: 'keep it simple' (…), porque tem demonstrado que (…) artigos mais coesos são muito mais lidos, muito mais citados (…).*"

may be useful to produce teaching materials and courses aiming at helping the less experienced members of this community in their English academic writing skills, considered extremely important to effectively participate in this community of practice.

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