

Use of Evidence: Short Examples of Outcome (b)

(Slide 1) This lecture gives several short examples to help clarify the second learning outcome to the concept of evidence.

(Slide 2) Some brief examples may help, because the previous lecture necessarily presupposed that listeners have some background reading academic writing. If you're entirely new to academic writing, then you probably will want to listen to this lecture again after you have a little more experience with college-level reading. Still, seeing some examples now may help you to recognize discussions of method when you see them for the first time in your own reading.

One way to see how scholars characterize each other's methods is to look at book reviews, so let's begin by looking at the review of a book that is rather obscure in subject matter and technical in nature, Elroy Bundy's *Studia Pindarica*. This book presents a detailed analysis of two poems by the ancient Greek poet Pindar. A review in the 1963 issue of the journal *The Classical Review* says clearly that:

His method is to write a running commentary on the odes he has selected, analysing in detail their content and structure with a wealth of illustration not only from the lyric poets but also, often most appositely, from the encomiastic parts of Greek prose-writers.

This is pretty clear as a description of what Bundy does. He presents a running commentary, that is, he picks a group of lines and talks about them, then picks the next several lines and talks about them, and so on through both poems. In particular, he looks at the poems' content and structure, and illustrates the techniques that Pindar follows with examples from other Greek authors.

(Slide 3) The passage quoted on the last slide conveniently was introduced with the word "method," so it clearly marked itself as a description of method. Immediately preceding that passage was another worthy of considering:

Bundy considers that the study of Pindar in particular must 'become a study of genre', and that only by analysing the poet's 'choice of formulae, motives, themes, topics and set sequences' can a correct view of the odes be arrived at. He insists that we have in Pindar 'an oral, public, epideictic literature dedicated to the single purpose of eulogizing men and communities' . . .

Here the reviewer uses Bundy's own words, very selectively, to describe what Bundy thought that he was doing. The study of Pindar must be a study of the genre in which he works, and this requires a focus on certain types of choices that Pindar makes. The next quote identifies features necessary for understanding the genre in which Pindar works: it is public and eulogistic.

Now, we may ask whether this constitutes an adequate characterization of Bundy's methods. The answer is, it depends on the context. This is sufficient for a two-page review, the purpose of which is to give the reader some idea of what the book contains and how it approaches its subject, but it might not

be sufficient for someone writing a book on Pindar, who wishes to respond to Bundy. Such a writer may focus in more detail on a particular aspect of Bundy's method, and therefore have to characterize it in greater detail.

(Slide 4) Take a minute to read this passage from the review of Eva-Marie Graf's *The Ontogenetic Development of Literal and Metaphorical Space in Language*, in the journal *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics*. Pause the lecture then press play when you're done. . . . The review begins its characterization of Graf's method by claiming that, broadly, she is a Whorfian, that is, it describes her methods in comparison to that of the linguist Benjamin Whorf. The claim that "spatial language and spatial thinking are closely interrelated" serves to explain what is meant here by the adjective Whorfian. The passage then focuses on the role of the image schema in Graf's book, and concludes with a characterization of the empirical evidence adduced by her.

(Slide 5) Both these examples merge a summary of the content of the book with a characterization of its method, so to that extent they are perhaps not pure examples, unlike the passage from *Applied Clay Science* given earlier. Still, the choice of what to include in a book is itself a reflection of method: Bundy's book presents a running commentary on two of Pindar's odes, and in a sense this is a summary of content (what it includes is a commentary), but it is also a characterization of method inasmuch as commentary, rather than say a synthetic account, is how Bundy approaches the text. But note that as summary of content, both these passages fall short: a proper summary would say more about content. So characterizations of method may address what is included in the work, inasmuch as they reflect choices that the author makes.

(Slide 6) Hopefully the last slide didn't make this sound more confusing than it is. If you think of content as describing the what that an author does, and methods the how, then you'll do alright. But maybe a little more clarification is in order. Think for a minute about the way that scientific research gets done. First the researcher identifies a problem, reads about what's already been done, and gets a general plan for what he intends to do in his research. Think of that as preparation, because it's only at that point that the original research proper begins. The researcher designs the experiments he's going to run, then he runs them and collects data, and finally he analyzes the resulting data. The last step is writing up the results and publishing them. In the sciences, when you describe a person's methods you really are focusing on the middle stage of this process, from research design through data analysis.

Does it make sense how this is what we are describing in our lectures as "the means used for treating evidence"? The research design dictates how evidence will be collected, and in fact what counts as evidence in the first place. How the data (or bits of evidence) are collected clearly counts under the heading of "means of treating evidence," as does analysis (what you do with the evidence once you've got it). So maybe this is a good, basic model for what counts as method in the sciences.

(Slide 7) In the humanities, the research process is less likely to follow this model. For Bundy, data collection isn't much of an issue: it just amounts to selecting which poems to study. The two slides we devoted to Bundy's book mostly focused on what in the sciences would be called "research design":

that is, his choice of the commentary as his method of analysis; his use of comparisons with other writers, including prose authors; and his focus on genre and all that that entails. So we can use our simple model even for the humanities, but that's not how people generally think about it. It's worth emphasizing that our phrase "means of treating evidence" might sound too much like the analysis stage alone, and if that's the case, this is a confusion that needs to be cleared up. Method is much broader than that.

(Slide 8) One final example comes from a discussion of Fama and French's paper "Taxing, Financing Decisions, and Firm Value," given in Swanson, Srinidhi, and Seetharaman's book *The Capital Structure Paradigm* (p. 55):

Fama and French (1998) performed regression analysis on the difference between market value and book value with respect to a set of variables . . . they employed differencing because they argued a heterogeneity-size problem would confound the findings. Their research design logic was that the slopes on dividend and interest variables should isolate tax effects if the variables in their regression equations represent the complete firm cash flow picture of the market.

Thus, the Fama and French paper uses regression, a statistical technique, as its method. Specifically, they regressed market value and book value, for reasons that the authors then go on to describe. Here the characterization of method includes a discussion of the reasons why Fama and French adopted the particular method that they chose. When you need to describe someone's method, our simple model is a good starting place, but don't try to adhere strictly to it. Say what you need to in order to help your readers understand the method of the author you're addressing. If that means explaining background or reasons, you certainly should do so. Just make sure you keep your focus on the how and not the what, and say what you need to in order to explain the how.

(Slide 9) When commonly used adjectives, or operational descriptions, aren't enough, then there's no way to generalize about how to characterize method. The above examples shouldn't be followed slavishly. Rather, they illustrate some elements that can go into characterizations of method. Different texts call for different approaches, and hopefully these examples will give you a better idea of the methods used in different fields.

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