

## **Generic Analysis of Thesis and Dissertation Abstracts: Variation across Cultures**

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### **Abstract**

Genre analysis, as concerned with the study of how language is used within a particular setting, or by a particular discourse community, has been in limelight quite recently. The present study seeks to fill a small gap in the literature devoted to abstracts. It aims at examining the construction and tantalization of scholarly abstracts written by native speakers of English, native speakers of Persian as well as native speakers of other languages. Points of difference and similarity between the corpora and members of the discourse community are explored with special reference to such issues as generic organization, personal involvement, and first language interference. The findings indicate that the generic structures prevail across linguistic borders; yet, national proclivities of the disciplinary members also affect their output.

**Key terms:** generic organization, genre analysis, micro-move, macro-move, rhetorical structure

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term 'genre' has frequently been focused in literary works and language education in recent times, particularly in relation to the teaching of reading and writing. This has been coincident with the requirement to equip students and novice researchers with discipline specific characteristics of research. Among these are research conventions and particularly the communicative moves that have received great attention (Swales, 1990; Peacock, 2002). Studies in ESL and ESP, Santos (2002)

states, provide evidence that more and more teachers and researchers are attaining hands-on spin-off from genre analysis to develop materials for language learners. Despite its recency in language teaching and language learning, the study of genre has been captivating the attention of several researchers, and this has led to the creation of a host of literature in genre analysis (Kress, 1982; Bakhtin, 1986; Fennel, Herndl and Miller, 1987; Swales, 1990; Nwogu, 1997; Holmes, 1997; Biria and Tahririan, 1997; Tarone, Dwyer, Gillette and Icke, 1998; Giannoni, 2002; Johns and Swales, 2002; Santos, 2002). In order to create research space in the discourse communities and be recognized as a member of a discourse community, scientists need to transmit their scientific research by means of publication (Samraj, 2002).

Therefore, it is essential for these scientists to be acquainted with and proficient in handling conventions. However, studies in contrastive rhetoric have demonstrated the influence of socio-cultural factors which account for rhetorical variations (Connor, 1996). Giannoni (2002) examined the socio-pragmatic organization and textualization of scholarly acknowledgements in English and Italian journals from a genre-analytic perspective. Fifty English texts and fifty Italian texts were selected from English and Italian journals and contrastively juxtaposed. Having studied the texts, the researcher detected a two-tier structure including a Main Move framed by an optional Introductory Move into which several steps were identified (p. 9). The contrastive study suggested that they both enjoyed disciplinary and linguistic variations; however, they were similar in having a common rhetorical core: Introductory and Main Moves. While the Introductory Move (Move I) targeted the public sphere of academic presentations and publications, the Main Move (Move II) concerned the authors' private debts to mentors and financial sponsors. Also interesting differences between the two languages bulked large. Italian researchers had employed a larger number of impersonal contributions in Move II, which allows a specific slot for asserting commonality and authorship. English researchers had a wider range and slightly larger proportion of thanking. Such findings reveal

generic variation across disciplines and cultures. In Movell, English researchers preferred to appear as debtors while their Italian counterparts preferred to be thankers due to the monetary metaphor.

Martin Martin's (2003) work on contrastive rhetoric reveals the degree of rhetorical variation between the research article abstracts written in English and Spanish journals in experimental social sciences. The results of his study divulged the presence of the international conventions based on the norms of the English academic community. Significant discrepancies between the English and Spanish abstracts were detected in the move structures of the abstracts.

Thus far, studies in genre analysis have aimed at identifying the generic structure of texts related to a particular field of study or to find a general relatedness between different fields in terms of the structure of the moves irrespective of the writers. Furthermore, work on contrastive rhetoric has been concerned with contrastive study and generic analysis of texts written in two or more languages (Taylor and Chen, 1991; Canagarajah, 2000; Martin Martin, 2003). Such studies reveal little about possible differences that may exist in the abstracts written in English by researchers from different first language backgrounds for their discourse community and possibly for publication in international journals. Swales (1990) expresses doubts regarding the existence of any published work that offers specific help for the non-native researcher or writer. He adds that one explanation for lack of related literature may be the belief that if a non-native speaker can write a research article, the presupposition is that he should have little trouble with the accompanying abstract. Other researchers in the field have referred to a flurry of work that have discussed the structure of article abstracts in terms of the macro-structure of introduction, method, results and conclusion (Biria and Tahririan, 1997; Martin Martin, 2003). However, little or no reference is made to differences in the abstracts written in English by researchers from diverse language backgrounds.

Considering the above gap in the previous studies, the purpose of the present study was to comparatively analyze the rhetorical structure of the

English abstracts of theses and dissertations written by three groups of researchers; namely, native speakers of English (NSE), native speakers of Persian (NSP) writing at Iranian universities, and native speakers of other languages (NSL) majoring in Applied Linguistics in an attempt to find out whether the same generic organization is imposed on the abstracts. The comparison helps to ease out the possible discrepancies in manipulating rhetorical structures and generic patterns that arise from first language interference as well as different socio-cultural patterns, even though the discipline and the language in which the thesis and dissertation abstracts are produced remain constant.

Crudely speaking, the reason for picking out this comparative work was to find out if the groups, belonging to the same discourse community, are different in terms of the type of genre they employ in writing the abstracts of their theses and dissertations. This counters the presently-held view that dissertations demonstrate "rather little in the way of distinct national characteristics. Instead, cross-nationally, disciplinary field or sub-field emerges as the strongest determinant of structure and rhetorical shape" (Johns and Swales, 2002: 15).

## **METHOD**

### **Corpus**

The corpus in this study included sixteen thesis and dissertation abstracts available in the library of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Isfahan University written by Iranian researchers at local universities, ten dissertation abstracts written by native speakers of English, and twenty three abstracts written by native speakers of other languages in the field of Applied Linguistics. The abstracts of the latter two groups were extracted from well-reputed internet cites. The rationale for the selection of the abstracts was their availability. To make the analysis more feasible, the abstracts were classified into three groups; namely, A, B and C representing NSP, NSL and NSE respectively. The rationale for the study was two-fold. First, a well-written abstract is characterized by being inclusive providing the reasons for and reference to the results of

the research. Hence, it is one of the most significant areas referred to by readers. This demands the writer's realization of the importance of effective communication and use of a coherent and informative language. Second, the abstracts produced by speakers of different languages reveal writers' awareness of the rhetorical and organizational features and the extent writers manifest stability in the format of abstracts they create. Thus, even though all such abstracts are written by writers who have exhibited sufficient command of English language proficiency, genre analysis might inform us about the effect of background knowledge of writers on their production.

### **Identification of the Moves**

Taking heed of the warning in Henry and Roseberry (1997: 483), the physical paragraphs were not considered as the obvious boundaries between the moves and rhetorical functions. The rhetorical functions were determined in terms of the communicative purpose of the genre. Having analyzed the abstracts in terms of the rhetorical macro structure of IMRC, the authors displayed the percentage of macro moves used by the authors of three groups of the study were determined.

*Table 1. The generic analysis of an abstract written by an NSP researcher*

Sentence	Move
S1. ESAP is a developing branch ...	Presenting background
S2. The main objective of ESAP programs...	Claim
S3. However, so far, no serious research has...	Limitations of previous research
S4. Thus, there is a pressing need...	Justification of present study
S5. The present reappraisals study primarily...	Statement of aim
S6. An additional goal of this study...	Statement of aim
S7. To address the aforementioned concerns, this study used...	Introducing new research
S8. The results of this study revealed...	Finding
S9. The findings of this research promise...	Implications

Table 2. The generic analysis of an abstract written by an NSL researcher

S1. This thesis is a qualitative ...	Focus of the study
S2. Its aim is to ...	Statement of aim
S3. The subjects of the study are thirty English majors....	Introducing new research
S4. Finding of the research is	Finding
S5. Another finding is...	Finding

Table 3. The generic analysis of an abstract written by an NSE researcher

Sentence	Move
S1. In Finland and Japan as in all countries, cultural assumptions	Presenting background
S2. This study was undertaken	Statement of aim
S3. The research model was applied to language planning...	Introducing new research
S4. Results provide an overall...	Finding
S5. While communication in English was an expressed goal...	finding
S6. In the Finish setting, test taking was only a...	Finding
S7. Classroom teaching methods, lesson segmentation...	Finding
S8. The Finish TEFL methods at the junior high school level appear successful in establishing...	Restatement of aim

In the first sample generic analysis, as demonstrated in Table1 above, S1 introduces the foregrounding function by activating the readers' background knowledge of the subject. The claim stated by the author in S2 is similarly supposed to lay out a background for the study. S3 in the same paragraph (paragraph one) expresses the limitations of previous research by using expressions such as 'however', 'unfortunately', 'but', 'despite' and 'fail'. This move is immediately followed by a justification move that voices out reasons for carrying out the research.

The second paragraph describes the primary objective followed by the researcher in administering the study. Sometimes the aim is spread across more than one sentence, if the study is intended to provide answers to certain sub-goals separately.

The third paragraph introduces the method and procedures used in the

study and by nature is likely to be longer involving description of the study, experiment and the design. The fourth paragraph reveals the findings of the study. Finally, the abstract ends in implications (pedagogical, theoretical and practical) for carrying out further research.

In order to determine the structure of the texts, it was noticed that move identification was not adequate. Knowledge of verbs and pronouns seemed to be useful. Concerning verb uses, the abstract, analyzed in Table 1, displays a fine distribution of verbs in terms of tense and voice across the paragraphs. Most of the verbs are used in active voice. Nevertheless, in the 'introducing new research' move, there is a tendency to use passive voice in order to neutralize the influence of the researcher on the results of the experiment. Regarding tense, in the same sample abstract, the first three moves use verbs in the present. Verbs in moves 4, 5 and 6, which particularly describe the research, are in the past. The final two moves are again used in the present, promising more work in future in the same area.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section comprises two major parts. The first part discusses the MACRO moves in the abstracts written by the three groups. The discussion examines the similarities and differences of the abstracts in terms of the moves. In the second part, the abstracts are compared and contrasted in terms of the MICRO moves.

### **MACRO Moves**

The schematic structure of the texts analyzed in this study revealed an aspect of text development that characterizes the way in which generic characteristics are organized in abstracts. Swales (1990) contends that an abstract is comprised of four obligatory MACRO moves, namely, Introduction, Method, Result and Conclusion (IMRC). In the *Introduction* macro move, the researcher is likely to describe background, previous works, limitations of previous works, justification of the present study, aims and statement of hypotheses. However, the

present study found that the primary purpose of this move is to state the aim of the research. This is similar to Hyland's (1990) conclusion that the introduction has only one obligatory move, Central Idea, which is compatible with his Proposition. A secondary purpose is to provide the reader with sufficient background knowledge to set the central idea. Method, the second macro move, introduces the procedures and the instruments that were used in the study while the Conclusion Move is likely to embody restatement of aims, implications and need for further research. Having analyzed the abstracts in terms of the rhetorical structure of IMRC, the macro moves used by the three groups in the study were identified. Table 4 presents their percentile frequency in the three groups.

*Table 4: The percentile frequency of macro moves used by the three groups*

Group	I	M	R	C
PS	100	100	100	50
NNS	100	95.5	91	78
ENS	90	100	90	50
Total	96.6	98.5	93.6	59.3

Studies in cognitive psychology and discourse analysis have shown that comprehension of texts is significantly affected by the saliency of rhetorical structures, especially in the case of non-native English readers. Considering these studies, Saleger-Mayer (1990) argues that a well-structured abstract should embody all the four components which are fundamental in the process of scientific inquiry in a logical order. As represented in Table 4, the first three moves have almost always been utilized by writers, while the Conclusion Move has been treated differently. Only 59 percent of the writers included the Conclusion Move in their abstracts, which is significantly lower in comparison with the other groups. This might partly be related to the nature of some of the abstracts. Of the five abstracts with Conclusion Move in the NSE, four abstracts were purely linguistic motivating the belief that abstracts in pure linguistics do not necessarily embody a Conclusion Move.



However, studying the abstracts written by the NSL group reveals that three abstracts written in strategies and task-based approaches do not include a Conclusion Move either, while four other abstracts concerned with pure linguistics do include a conclusion section. Furthermore, only 50% of the abstracts written by NNS group include a conclusion section, which plainly counters the claim that Conclusion Move is obligatory. Frequency analysis of the Moves demonstrated the researchers' concern for the Conclusion Move. The low frequency of the final move by the three groups indicates the optionality of this Move in the abstracts under study. Following other researchers (Henry and Roseberry, 1997; Hasan, 1989), who have considered the formula IMR(C), we also contend that the presence of C is in free variation.

Another facet in Saleger-Mayer's(1990) considerations of rhetorical structures concerns the paragraphs. When abstracts are made up of one paragraph, no conceptual overlapping should be observed from one paragraph to another. Persian researchers in this study demonstrated an excessive tendency to signal move change by moving from one paragraph to another, using an explicit language. However, the other two groups did not act on a par with the Persian group showing greater variation in paragraph and move boundary. In NSE group, one writer (C3) blended Result with Conclusion moves while another (C10) one lets Method, Result and Conclusion moves merge into one another as exemplified in the following extract:

3.1.1. It is argued that the legal profession can be regarded as a discourse community and that law reports are a genre owned by that discourse community. This is clear when Swales (1990) criteria are applied. The reading strategies used by experienced members of the discourse community when reading law reports, then, are influenced by the generic structure of the texts. Therefore, it is suggested that the most efficient approach to reading law reports in the EALP classroom would be one informed by knowledge of their generic structure(C3).

3.1.2. The approach suggested is based on a genre analysis of eighteen

law reports chosen at random from three subject areas. The move structure was identified and is described in chapter 3. A pedagogical approach to the use of reports in the EALP classroom is then proposed. This takes account of the fact that the aim of reading law reports is to identify those facts that are legally material and to follow the process of legal reasoning that leads to the judge's decision. It involves a two-stage process, first getting an overview of a report by reading its earlier sections, and secondly identifying and reading those parts of the later section that will enable the reader to formulate the legal principle on which the decision was based. (C10)

More exacerbating is the NSL group who functioned more variably. About 34.7 percent of the group variably mixed moves 2, 3 and 4, which has resulted in the fuzziness of the boundaries of the moves and hence made it difficult to draw a sharp line where a move ends and another begins. That is, paragraph boundary does not match move boundary. This is illustrated in the following example (B22):

3.1.3. Data were collected from 275 Greek learners of ESL at three proficiency levels ... using three tasks: essay writing, translation test, and blank filling. The essay writing provided evidence of accurate free production of collocations, while the translation and blank-filling tests measured accuracy in the subjects knowledge of collocations in cued production tasks. The data were examined with respect to the between- and within-group differences in accuracy in all three dependent measures. Statistical measures were employed to determine the significance of the observed between- and within-group differences, and implicational scaling analysis was used to reveal accuracy orders in the acquisition of collocations. Results show that there are patterns of development of collocational knowledge across and within the different proficiency groups for both the free and the cued production data. Collocational knowledge was shown to increase steadily as the level of proficiency increased, and there were group specific accuracy orders showing that grammatical collocations are easier to acquire than lexical collocations. The development of collocational knowledge was found to be influenced

by the syntactic complexity of the collocation types, and also by exposure and maturation. Finally, three stages for the development of collocational knowledge are proposed. In the first stage learners acquire collocations as unanalyzed lexical items, and hence the learners are more accurate with lexical collocations than complex grammatical ones. At the second stage the learners' grammatical knowledge develops enabling learners to use complex grammatical collocations with greater accuracy than in stage one. At the third stage of collocational development, learners are able to use both grammatical and lexical collocations with greater accuracy than in the other two stages, and they are on their way to a more advanced level of collocational knowledge. (B22)

In the sample abstracts studied in the present research, unlike the claim made by Martin (2002), no significant difference was observed in the Introduction section in the three groups. However, a close scrutiny of the Introduction section of the abstracts divulged the complexity of this unit in terms of rhetorical options. This is in congruity with Martin's (2002) and Swales' (1990) conclusion that Introductions are problematic in the sense that there are practically unlimited ways of opening an abstract. It was discovered that most of the moves that Swales enumerated from this Macro move in the analysis of research articles were also reflected in the Introduction unit of the abstracts.

The frequency of occurrence of Method section was 100%, 68% and 70% in the abstracts by NSP, NSL and NSE respectively. The lower frequency in two of the groups is likely to be due to the nature of the abstracts in as much as the abstracts are written in descriptive linguistics and this has evidently affected the organization of the abstracts. Majority of the abstracts were rather long where the authors described the points germane to the materials, subjects, data, procedures and the methodology. An interesting point is that the Method section had been treated as a totally independent unit. Nonetheless, in two of the abstracts, i.e. one in NSP and one in NSE groups, analyzed in the present study, this move was coalesced with the surrounding moves.

The Result move is the place where the authors report on the major

outcomes of their experiments or the effects observed. This Move is usually signaled in English by means of such expressions as the results, findings, resultant empirical findings, our attempts made by this study, etc. A further property of this Move as well as the Conclusion move is that writers of the three groups opted to present the main findings by making use of hedging devices. The findings partially conform with Martin Martin's (2003) conclusion that writers tended to present main findings tentatively; however, they contradict his conclusion that non-natives avoid hedging. In fact, the results might emphasize the writers' concerns to introduce their findings more subjectively in order to find research space and protect themselves against criticism from the academic community.

### 3.2. Micro-Moves

As demonstrated in the Micro- Moves tables, the identified moves were as follows: 1. presenting background 2. reference to previous work 3. limitations of previous research 4. justification of present study 5. statement of aims 6. hypothesis 7. introducing new research 8. results and findings 9. restatement of aims 10. implications and 11. need for further research. The abstracts divulged a number of discrepancies across the groups.

3.2.1. Concerning the order of the micro-moves, Persian researchers had almost always observed the above order in their writing. The only exception was A7 where the researcher has given priority to 'statement of the aim' move over 'presenting background' move. However, the NSL group had shown more fluctuation in terms of the order of the moves. B15, for example, had begun with 'statement of aim' followed by 'the research hypotheses'. Subsequently reference had been given to 'previous research' and then 'limits of previous research' had been stated. Change in order was also observed in B18 and B23. Likewise, the NSE group had shown some degree of variability in the order of the move. C3 and first mentioned 'implications' followed by the restatement of aims' move. C9 had begun his abstract by 'statement of aims' followed by 'limits of

previous research' while C10 had begun by 'statement of aim' proceeded by 'presenting background'. Being overconcerned with the organization of information, the Iranian researchers seem to stick to the hard and fast procedures of writing abstracts by observing the arrangement of information in the text and little creativity and variability in the order is depicted in the way abstracts are developed. In order to illustrate the above-mentioned organization, three sample paragraphs representing the three groups of the study are given below:

3.2.1. English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) is a developing branch of the EFL in Iran. The main objective of the ESAP programs at Iranian universities is claimed to be filling the gap between the students' general English competence and their ability to read authentic discipline-specific texts. However, so far, no serious research has systematically addressed such fundamental issues as accountability and goal achievement in university ESAP curriculums. Thus, there is a pressing need for shedding some light on the general functioning of the ESAP enterprise. (A1)

3.2.2. The main purpose of this thesis is to investigate how case marking is determined in Korean. My hypothesis is that the answer lies in the interaction between semantics and pragmatics. Many previous approaches rely on purely formal properties to account for Korean case marking. By beginning NOM/ACC marking a minimal functional load, the previous approaches fail to provide much insight into the question of why NOM/ACC case marking plays such an important semantic AND PRAGMATIC ROLES IN Korean. In This thesis, I demonstrate that Role and Reference Grammar provides the fundamental answers to the recurring problems of Korean case marking. It will be argued that the distinction between semantic case vs. pragmatic case is needed to account for Korean case marking. (B15)

3.2.3. This dissertation suggests an approach to reading law reports in the teaching of English for Academic Legal Purposes (EALP). A law report is a detailed published account of a case decided in the superior courts, containing a statement of facts and the reasons for the decision of

the court. Law reports are used as evidence in court and as a basis for legal opinions. (C10)

3.3. The eleven moves identified in the abstracts of the researchers of the three groups had been treated differently. Only three moves, i.e. 'statement of aim', 'introducing new research' and 'results and findings' have been considered obligatory and applied by the three groups. The Persian group among others has shown more consistency in using 'findings' in their abstracts. However, there is more variation across the other moves. For example, 'restatement of aim' had been employed by 40 percent of NSE group as opposed to 18.7 and 30 percent of NSP and NSL groups respectively. An interesting point is that while the Persian group had spurned using 'need for further research', NSL group has avoided 'justification for present study' and the NSE group had avoided both. Absence of these two moves in the NSE abstracts might be in line with the fact that native speakers had tended to offer only salient information and circumvent sentences which might not be extremely informative. The higher percentage of the total number of moves utilized by the Persian researchers is likely to explain their concern for completeness and informativeness of the abstract. The following examples delineate the above claim concerning the three groups of the study in tandem:

The findings of the present research confirmed the positive role of technical terms in enhancing the EFL learners' comprehension of sub-technical and core vocabulary. It was found out that technical terms in collocation with the other two types of the ESP vocabulary, narrow down their semantic domain and pave the way for the reader to get to their proper meaning, ultimately facilitating the comprehension of the specialist texts. (A9, final paragraph)

This study investigates the effect of interaction on the comprehension of input containing new lexical items and the acquisition of these new lexical items. Fourteen kindergarten English as a second language (ESL) students and a native-English-speaking teacher participated in the study which incorporated a pretest-posttest design in two rounds. All subjects

completed the pretests and posttests. An experimental group of 11 subjects participated in four communication tasks (one individual task and one group task in each of the two rounds) which comprised the treatment phase of the study while the remaining 3 subjects formed the control group. New lexical items were embedded in the task instructions. As a result of each communication task, each subject received an interaction score based on the number of negotiations for the meanings of the new lexical items he or she initiated. The comprehension score was based on the degree to which the task was successfully completed. The acquisition score was obtained by comparing pretest and posttest results. The results reveal that the amount of interaction the subjects initiate is significantly, but inconsistently, related to comprehension but appears to be unrelated to acquisition. Furthermore, comprehension appears to have no effect on subsequent acquisition which, however, does take place. The results support the claim that negotiated interaction can facilitate comprehension. However, this is tempered by evidence, also found in the present study, which supports the claim that teachers' elaborations can confuse learners and impede comprehension. Finally, the results offer confirming evidence for the claim that classroom interaction can facilitate comprehension for those learners who are exposed to the interaction as well as those learners who actually engage in the interaction. (B20)

This dissertation sets out to:

1. describe the stages of development of a series of in-company ESP courses for an industrial client,
2. examine and evaluate the success and effectiveness of the courses in order to assess the relevance of such courses for the future.

In doing so a number of areas will be considered which are seen by the author as necessary for the design, implementation and evaluation of such courses.

Two main areas are considered, approaches to syllabus design, and approaches to a methodology of ESP, including examination of needs analysis, materials, learning-centeredness, and learner-centeredness.

While these areas are generally accepted as characterizing courses in ESP, the dissertation also describes the role of negotiation between students, teachers and sponsoring bodies in the syllabus creation process. This is seen as fundamental since the development of a number of courses over a period of approximately one year meant that consideration had to be given to those approaches to syllabus design and ESP methodology which allow for flexibility to be an integral part of the course development process.

This dissertation shows that the syllabus need not be a content-centred, a priori construct. Rather there exist alternatives that make use of negotiated and retrospective approaches to syllabus design. (C7)

Following Henry and Roseberry (1997), the total number of finite verbs was counted and their tense (present / past) and voice (active / passive) were determined. In the analysis, bare 'en' particle was discounted. Verb count showed that Persian researchers showed a greater tendency to use past tense rather than present tense. In other words, past tense dominated the choice of verb tense. This tendency is likely to arise from the fact that an abstract is usually written after the project has been completed. However, NSE and NSL groups exhibited the opposite inclination for the use of present tense verbs. The difference among the three groups might, similarly, represent differences among the groups in terms of the extent to which they applied historical present to talk about events that happened in the past. With regard to the verb voice, the active is the more common choice used in 66%, 66% and 56% of the cases by the NSP, NSE and NSL respectively. This also supports the claim by Henry and Roseberry (1997) that active voice was used predominantly in the essays they investigated for their generic characteristics. Likewise, the results conform to Tarone et al's (1998) findings. Tables 5 and 6 below exhibit the frequency and percentage of tense and voice used by the three groups.

In the verb count of the 'method' and 'results' sections, as shown in Tables 7 and 8 below, it was noticed that the three groups handled active/passive verbs very similarly.



*Table 5: Verb types and frequency of micro moves*

Group	Present	Past	Active	Passive
NNS	122	186	204	104
ENS	421	22	358	185
NSL	161	39	112	88

*Table 6: Verb types and the percentage of micro moves*

Group	Present	Past	Active	Passive
NNS	39.6	60	66	34
ENS	77.5	22.5	66	34
NSL	80	20	56	44

*Table 7: Tense and voice in method and result sections*

Group	Present	Past	Active	Passive
NNS	19.5	80.5	63.5	36.5
ENS	70.8	29.2	62.8	37.2
NSL	72	28	57	43

*Table 8: Tense and voice in 'method' and 'result' sections*

Group	Present	Past	Active	Passive
NNS	34	140	111	73
ENS	275	113	244	144
NSL	94	36	74	56

While there seems to be sporadic variation in the frequency of active as opposed to passive forms, the overall preference of the groups has been for the passive construction. However, the NSE and NSL groups exhibited an overarching tendency for the present tense while the Persian group showed a dominating inclination for the past. Thus, with the abstracts under study being regarded as representative of the writing style in their writers' disciplines, it appears that the passive verb form is utilized less frequently than the active by the researchers in the discourse community. Nevertheless, tense might not be described as a common feature of this community because decisions on which tense to use might be affected by other factors, as the present data reveals, among which are the researchers' first language and the methods they have learned for

writing abstracts.

Table 9. Frequency and percentage of active and passive voice for each move within the three groups

Move	Group	Active		Passive	
		N	%	N	%
Presenting background	NNS	16	76	5	24
	ENS	9	75	3	25
	NSL	7	77	2	23
Reference to previous work	NNS	17	74	6	26
	ENS	3	100	0	0
	NSL	3	100	0	0
Limits of previous research	NNS	9	100	0	0
	ENS	4	80	1	20
	NSL	4	80	1	20
Justification of present study	NNS	6	100	0	0
	ENS	3	100	0	0
	NSL	0	0	0	0
Statement of aims	NNS	22	81.5	5	18.5
	ENS	43	89.5	5	10.5
	NSL	12	63	7	37
Hypothesis	NNS	5	83	1	17
	ENS	5	83	1	17
	NSL	0	0	0	0
Introducing new research	NNS	35	38	57	62
	ENS	47	44	59	56
	NSL	13	35	24	65
Results and findings	NNS	71	80.5	17	19.5
	ENS	81	68.5	37	21.5
	NSL	19	68	9	32
Restatement of aims	NNS	6	86	1	14
	ENS	9	75	3	25
	NSL	5	100	0	0
Implications	NNS	7	63.5	4	36.5
	ENS	20	64.5	11	35.5
	NSL	8	57	6	43
Need for further research	NNS	0	0	0	0
	ENS	0	0	3	100
	NSL	0	0	0	0

In order to arrive at a clearer picture of the use of active and passive voices, frequency distribution of the verb voice was calculated for each move. Table 9 below illustrates the frequency and percentage of the active and passive voices used across the three groups for each move in isolation. In order to obtain a better understanding of the discourse community, abstracts written in pure linguistics were excluded from the analysis.

As shown in the above table, considerable homogeneity can be observed between the three groups in terms of active/passive use upon which one may claim that there is a tendency for the researchers' community in the field to sound alike. The verbs in the Introduction macro move have been predominantly used in the active voice. However, abundant use of passive construction signals transition into the Method macro move. This is followed by a resurgence of the abundant use of the active voice in the Results move, more specifically, verb voice. That is, voice is a characteristic feature of the moves and move boundaries. An exception to this generalization is the dominance of active voice in the Conclusion move, which does not provide us with a reason for the move boundary.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The rationale behind the present study was to examine and analyze the move and rhetorical structures used in thesis and dissertation abstracts by researchers in applied linguistics and language teaching in an attempt to find out whether the researcher truly represent a discourse community. Certain ideas, as Widdowson maintains, "become a kind of catchphrase currency whose value is taken for granted without further inquiry. And thus we become slogan prone" (Widdowson, 1998: 705). Mavor and Trayner (2001) warn that "it would seem to be a misrepresentation of the nature of genres to characterize them by the universal application of formulas prescribed by conventions, lexis, style or form" (p. 350). Organization of language features, e.g. voice, may partially be suggestive of the use of a particular genre. More specifically, genres are

characterized by the "transformative interaction of purpose, audience and persona" (p. 351).

Analysis of the texts in this study brings us to the conclusion that despite the common grounds, which can be traced in all texts, there exist a number of conflicting points that might be explained using a number of intervening factors. This is partly in consonance with Giannoni's (2002) research results who compared acknowledgements written in English with corresponding texts in Italian. Another conclusion is the need for raising awareness about the differences between the genres and rhetorical organization found within the texts written by the three groups. These differences can be accounted for on the basis of socio-cultural factors including different rhetorical styles and the degree of influence of academic writing instruction.

As to the implications of the study, the results will provide novice Iranian researchers with the generic knowledge of creating abstracts. Having possessed a conscious knowledge of the rhetorical structure of the abstracts, the novice Iranian researchers can experiment with different strategies and then decide which moves are necessary for communication of knowledge and how the moves are to be organized across the abstract to communicate the intended message most effectively and to meet the requirements made by the international discourse community. They will also realize that the moves do not represent fixed genre conventions, but are of dynamic interaction between the conventions made by the discourse community.

English for Academic Purposes and English for Specific Purposes instruction and materials development may benefit from the results of textual analysis of discourses that the SL students need to learn. Also, understanding textual norms in different disciplines will enable researchers to provide instruction that better prepares students for the disciplinary communities in which they are seeking membership (Samraj, 2002).

It should be noted that the extent sociocultural factors condition the way academic writers write abstracts can be determined by carrying out

more contrastive analyses on this genre across different languages and different disciplines, especially those more likely to bear direct effects of cultural differences. Another fruitful line of inquiry might study whether direct genre instruction will bear positive results. Still a further area of investigation concerns comparative analysis of hedging devices as a strategy employed by native and non-native academic writers.

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