

GENRE ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH ARTICLE ABSTRACTS IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Abduganiyeva Zebuniso Abduhafizovna

Teacher, Uzbek State World language university

Ganiyevaz.95@gmail.com

Abstract

Journal editors often rely on abstracts to decide whether or not to read a research article. While abstracts have been recognized as important in applied linguistics, they have been relatively neglected in research. This paper aims to conduct a genre analysis of research article (RA) abstracts. The paper will begin by providing an overview of the concept of genre and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approaches to genre analysis. Following this, twelve RA abstracts from the journal Applied Linguistics will be analyzed using Pho's (2008) model as a framework. The findings of this analysis will then be compared with existing literature on the topic and discussed in terms of their relevance to the language classroom.

Keywords: abstract, genre, ESP, applied linguistics, five-move model, research article.

The genre analysis of research article abstracts in applied linguistics is a pivotal endeavor that offers valuable insights into the intricate world of academic discourse. In the realm of applied linguistics, where the effective communication of research findings is paramount, the abstract serves as a concise yet comprehensive gateway to the underlying research. Understanding the specific genre conventions that shape these abstracts is crucial for both scholars and aspiring researchers in the field. This article delves into the nuanced realm of genre analysis, exploring the distinctive features and communicative functions that define research article abstracts within the domain of applied linguistics. Through this investigation, we aim to shed light on the structural, linguistic, and rhetorical dimensions of these abstracts, ultimately contributing to a deeper comprehension of how language and genre intersect in academic discourse.

Theoretical Background

An abstract is a concise summary of a longer text, providing readers with brief and clear information about the full article. In academic discourse, a Research Article (RA) abstract is a succinct representation of the primary features of the research article (Samaraj, 2005). It saves readers time, reduces language barriers, previews the article's content, and offers a basic understanding of the research (Cross, Oppenheim, 2005). Consequently, journal editors often make decisions about reading a research article based on its abstract.

Crafting a well-structured and informative abstract is pivotal for researchers seeking publication in scholarly journals. Even a meticulously organized research study may be rejected without a well-written abstract. Publishing a research article is often perceived as a

challenging task, particularly for novice researchers. Therefore, teaching genre analysis of Research Article (RA) abstracts is essential to prepare Uzbek postgraduate students for the rigors of publishing their papers.

Swales (1990), a prominent figure in ESP genre studies, defines genre as a collection of "communicative events" in which participants share similar "communicative purposes." However, he later acknowledges that genre definitions are often metaphorical (Swales, 2004). He offers six metaphors, each defining various characteristics of genre: "genre as frame," facilitating communication; "genre as standard," defining appropriateness; "genre as biological species," subject to change; "genre as families," with common genetic backgrounds; "genre as institutions," sharing concerns and traditions but having distinct roles; and "genre as speech acts," constructing texts demanded by specific situations. These metaphors highlight the multifaceted nature of genres (Swales, 2004). Recognizing the significance of abstracts, Swales (2004) asserted that abstracts are a "neglected" area of research in applied linguistics. This claim has inspired numerous studies across various fields, including medicine, energy, education, and applied linguistics.

Methods

Twelve RA abstracts are randomly chosen from the journal Applied Linguistics for analysis. In order to understand present writing practices, we selected the RA abstracts published only in 2018. Then the abstracts are adjusted for manual genre analysis, removing the research article, its title, information about writers, and keywords. Pho's (2008) five-move model is adopted for analysis. This model is used for the framework in our analysis because it has been considered a more suitable framework for genre analysis of abstracts by researchers (Tseng, 2011; Can et al., 2016).

According to Pho (2008), there are five moves in abstracts that indicate the macrostructure of the whole research article. These moves are "introduction, purpose, method, product, and conclusion" (Pho, 2008). Similar to Hyland's (2000) model, it also differentiates author's purpose from introduction, which was omitted in other models (e.g. Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993). However, it includes questions which Hyland's (2000) model did not contain. This model is used for analysis since these questions make it easy to realize each move's structure in the abstracts.

Pho's (2008) five-move model has gained recognition as a suitable framework for analyzing abstracts. This model defines five moves in abstracts, namely "introduction, purpose, method, product, and conclusion," offering distinctions like differentiating author's purpose from introduction. It includes questions that aid in understanding each move's structure within abstracts, making it a favored choice for analysis by many researchers.

The analysis of our research indicated that selected RA abstracts rarely contained all these 5 moves. We found only 3 out of 12 abstracts that contained all rhetorical moves. A detailed analysis of each move will be presented below.

Discussion

Our findings are generally consistent with previous research in terms of the occurrence of the five-move model and move 1, 3, 4 (Can et al., 2016; Pho, 2008; Tseng, 2011); however, there are some inconsistencies, especially regarding the frequencies of move 5 (e.g., Hyland, 2000; Santos, 1996). This can be because of either our restricted focus on one journal (Applied Linguistics) or alterations in the importance of these moves. Interestingly, we obtained quite similar results with Can et al.'s (2016) and Pho's (2008) results. We will compare our findings with previous research in the discipline of applied linguistics as our chosen journal belongs to this area.

Similar to all studies, we found move 2, 3 and 4 to be the most mandatory elements in RA abstracts. Even though there are slight differences in the percentage of abstracts that followed five-move model, we also found that researchers rarely follow five-move structure (Hyland, 2000; Pho, 2008; Tseng, 2011). Our findings of move 5 resembled with more recently conducted research on RA abstracts in applied linguistics (Can et al, 2016; Pho, 2008; Tseng, 2011), than older literature (e.g. Hyland, 2000; Santos, 1996). However, higher occurrences of move 5 is found in the present paper than all previous studies. It can be due to changes in the structure of abstracts over time. It seems recent journals have required interpretations or implications of the research in the RA abstracts than in ever before.

Suggestions for classroom implication

In accordance with Paltridge's framework (2001), we intend to introduce a classroom activity in which we will implement our analysis. This activity is designed for a target audience of postgraduate students engaged in dissertation work within the field of applied linguistics. The primary objective of this activity is to enhance the abilities of postgraduate students in several ways. First of all, it elevates their awareness of the specific genre they will be composing. Moreover, it can provide students a comprehensive understanding of the entire generic structure of Research Article (RA) abstracts. Furthermore, this activity may enable the identification of both differences and similarities among various abstracts. Finally the activity aims to empower students to produce abstracts adhering to the same genre conventions. This classroom activity is divided into two distinct stages:

Stage 1: Raising Students' Awareness of Genre

Begin with an open classroom discussion, posing thought-provoking questions about RA abstracts, including their purpose, defining characteristics, and their relationship with research articles. Provide students with an exemplar abstract that showcases all essential moves. Introduce background information on genre analysis for RA abstracts, along with Pho's (2008) model (Table 1), explaining the function of each move and sub-move. Encourage active engagement with the provided abstract, emphasizing the identification of functional features. Foster discussions among students to share findings in pairs, highlighting differences and similarities among the abstracts.

Stage 2: Students Producing Their Own Genre

Shift the focus to students creating their abstracts for potential publication in the journal *Applied Linguistics*, informed by linguistic and discursive patterns from Stage 1. Promote collaboration through a peer exchange of compositions. Assign the role of editors for the journal *Applied Linguistics* to students, where they evaluate peers' abstracts, gaining insights into editors' expectations. Conclude with an open classroom discussion where students share decisions and rationale for judgments, encouraging exploration of abstract revisions based on their insights and journal standards.

The significance of this activity is multi-fold. Scholarly journals have become increasingly stringent in their acceptance criteria, and one essential element they demand is a well-crafted abstract (Martin, 2003; Tseng, 2011). The quality of an abstract can determine the fate of a research paper; without an effective abstract, rejection remains a likely outcome (Tseng, 2011). Furthermore, it has been noted that postgraduate students often lack the necessary skills for successful publication (Burgione et al., 2011), making this task particularly challenging for them. Teaching genre analysis of Research Article (RA) abstracts becomes pivotal, especially for L2 postgraduate students, as it equips them with the skills needed to structure their text effectively and meet readers' expectations (Pho, 2008; Paltridge, 2012).

Considering that the journal *Applied Linguistics* accepts only a limited percentage of articles (Renandya, 2014), it underscores the reliability and significance of the papers it publishes. This also suggests that the abstracts of these articles are likely well-structured, given that readers often form their initial impressions of a research paper based on its abstract (El-Dahks, 2018). Teaching the generic structure of abstracts within this specific journal can prove invaluable for postgraduate students engaged in research, particularly in the field of applied linguistics.

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