The 8th International Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) Seminar - Aligning Theoretical Knowledge with Professional Practice

A Genre Analysis of Islamic Academic Research Article Introductions

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Abstract

This study explores the rhetorical organization of Islamic research article introductions based on Swales' (1990) CARS (Create a Research Space) model. Based on the model, sixty Islamic research article introductions were analyzed in terms of the move structure and linguistic features that signal the use of the move. Findings show that most of the introductions contain all the moves prescribed by the model but the introductions that strictly follow the CARS Move structure is relatively small. This suggests that most of the introductions employ the rhetorical moves proposed by the CARS model, but deviate in terms of their organization.

Keywords: Genre analysis; English for Academic Purposes; Create a Research Space (CARS) model; Islamic Research Article Introductions

1. Introduction

In second language (L2) writing, it is crucial for learners to have an understanding of genre knowledge. It will help them produce texts or written discourses according to the convention characterized by the discourse community and achieve the communicative purpose of the discourse. This genre awareness becomes particularly important and useful for learners at tertiary level, as they need to write academic texts according to the disciplinary specialization at university. Thus, the concept of genre helps "locate what is particular to each kind

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of writing and what skills and knowledge students need in order to be able to communicate effectively within each kind" Bazerman [1].

Academic texts such the research article (RA) is considered as genre and it is identified by "a recognizable communicative purpose and by the presence of characteristic features with standardized form, function, and presentation that are part of its general conventions", Thomas & Hawes [2]. Thus, in order to produce an effective research article, the writer must adhere to this generic rules and convention. The ability to write research article according to the discourse conventions can help the writer gain recognition in his/her academic disciplines through the publication of the research article.

In this regard, genre analysis has become a useful tool in describing and relating the linguistic features of a genre to their function and purpose. It provides a method to identify the communicative strategies or moves and the linguistic features found in genres. This system of analysis of academic texts "can be utilized for a number of applied linguistic purposes, including the teaching of English for Specific Purposes" Bhatia [3].

An influential research by Swales [4] helped to form the theory of genre in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Swales [4] defined genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes." Swales's [4] research focused on the rhetorical organization of certain sections of the research article, particularly the introduction section. Central to this approach is the move structure analysis, which involves the identification of a "recurrent pattern commonly used to organize the content of a genre, and then relating the stages of this content-organizing pattern to specific linguistic features" Bruce [5]. Following his research, Swales [4] proposed the Create a Research Space (CARS) model that can be used as an analytical tool to investigate the rhetorical structure of research article introductions.

Many studies have been done on the rhetorical structure of research article introductions. In her study, Samraj [6] employed the CARS model to analyze the research article introductions from two related fields; Wildlife Behaviour and Conservation Biology. A greater degree of embedding was found in the analyzed texts, which was not captured by the CARS model. The study revealed that reference to previous literature is an element that can be found in different moves in the model. In addition, the researcher found variation in strategies/steps such as the use of "positive justification" that is not accounted for in the CARS model. Anthony [7] also found the use of a new step in the software engineering's RA introductions. This "evaluation step" appears in all of the introductions and in this step, the present research is evaluated with regards to its novelty or applicability in the professional context. Both researchers agree that the CARS model did capture the main rhetorical organizations of the introduction. However, it needs to be more flexible to account for certain variations or features that are discipline specific.

The CARS model has also been used to analyze RA introductions in languages other than English. These cross-cultural studies reveal the differences and cultural influences in the rhetorical organization of RA introductions. Hirano [8] found that the Brazilian ESP RA introductions lack Move 2 where the writers need to establish a niche for their research. This suggests that Brazilian writers when writing in Portuguese tend to avoid establishing a niche, which requires them to expose the fault in researches by their Brazilian colleagues. The feeling of solidarity with the local research community may lead the Brazilian scholars to avoid conflict with other researchers. The cultural influence can also be seen in Thai RA introductions. In her study, Jogthong [9] reports that Thai writers avoid using Move 1 Step 1 (Centrality claims) in their RA introductions. She explains that this may be due to the Thai culture in which it is improper for the writers to assert claims of their own work and promote themselves in public. This cultural aspect may also cause them to be reluctant to criticize others' work in Step 3 (Reviewing previous research) as this act would be seen as disrespecting their fellow researchers. From the previous studies, it can be concluded that disciplinary variations and cultural aspects can influence the rhetorical structure and language use in the research article introductions.

Though researchers set out to investigate the rhetorical organization of RA introductions in different academic fields and different languages, to the best of our knowledge, no study has been done with regard to the rhetorical organization of Islamic RA introductions. The present study, therefore, will analyze the rhetorical organization of