

Genre Analysis in EAP—A Case Study of TESOL Research Article Abstract

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Abstract: To reinforce the pedagogical significance of genre analysis in EAP, the current study analyzed thirty research article abstracts in TESOL with genre analysis approach, aiming to serve non-native pre-service/novice English teachers. The results showed that TESOL Abstract generally includes these moves: Introduction, Purpose, Method, Results, and Conclusion (optional). In addition, move signals are common in Abstract and the tenses in Abstract vary with moves. Finally, two teaching designs were recommended on how these findings can be utilized to inform EAP pedagogy. The task-based genre approach proposed in this paper endows learners with both genre knowledge and genre skills. The pedagogy based on ‘teaching-learning cycle’ facilitates learners to write qualified abstracts step by step. In real teaching practice, the two methods can be used synthetically to yield maximum benefits.

1. Introduction

Genre analysis is a useful tool of researching and teaching EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes; [1, 2]). To this end, many genre analysis studies have been conducted to inform EAP pedagogy, and often with particular emphasis on serving non-native English learners. However, there is a lack of focus on meeting the needs of English teachers through genre analysis studies, despite the fact that most English teachers are in fact non-native English speakers and they also have difficulty in academic communication in English. Considering the importance of abstracts in conveying academic ideas, the current study explored research article abstracts in TESOL with genre analysis approach, aiming to help non-native TESOL practitioners become more successful in academic or professional English reading and writing.

The main content of the essay is organized in this way. Firstly, it briefs the research background of genre analysis, through which the significance and the motivation are highlighted. Then, the research methods are clearly presented, covering abstract selection, analytical approach, etc. After that, the research findings are discussed in detail and compared with others where appropriate. Finally, suggestions are given on how to inform EAP pedagogical practice with genre study.

2. Research Background: Genre Analysis and EAP

Since the 1980s, genre analysis has been drawing increasing interest from EAP practitioners due to its pedagogical significance [3, 4]. Genre analysis can ‘provide satisfactory models and descriptions of academic and scientific texts’, which is particularly valuable for novice and non-native students [5]. Mastering the organizational and linguistic features of those texts, students can become better readers and writers in their disciplines or professional areas [6, 7]. As [8] rightly point out,

Genre analysis ... adds to our understanding of how language is used within an important discourse community, and is a model of applied linguistics in its best sense-it draws on linguistic and sociolinguistic theory to classify the nature of language use and learning in an educational setting.

Due to the significance of genre analysis, many studies have been conducted in this area. There are five distinctive research features of genre analysis. Firstly, relevant studies cover a large variety of genres, such as dissertations, lectures, presentations, research articles, etc. Secondly, among various genres, research articles draw the greatest attention because of their importance in academic communication (ibid). Each section of research articles has been much studied, such as Introduction [9], Methods [10], Results [11], Discussion [12-13], and also independent section Abstract [15], etc. Thirdly, disciplinary variability is highlighted in the studies of genre analysis [14]. Comparatively speaking, there are more studies on genre analysis in natural sciences than in social sciences (op. cit.). Fourthly, cross-cultural comparison has become a recent trend in genre analysis, e.g., [15, 16]. Fifthly, diachronic changes of genres have been noticed by some researchers, e.g., [17, 18].

This essay will focus on analyzing TESOL Abstract with genre-based approach. A well-written abstract can effectively facilitate the understanding of the original article [19]. However, it is very likely for non-native writers and researchers to be troubled with abstract writing [20]. Despite the fact that almost 80% of English teachers are non-native English speakers [21], there is not much research on TESOL Abstract or writing suggestions for English teachers. It might be presumed that English teachers, non-native as they are, should have no difficulty in English writing. In fact, writing abstracts can also be a great challenge for pre-service/novice TESOL practitioners due to the high requirements of abstracts: short yet informative [22], lexically and propositionally dense [23], syntactically and semantically coherent [24]. Therefore, this research is conducted with the pedagogical motivation of helping non-native TESOL practitioners in abstract writing.

Before further discussing and doing genre analysis, it is necessary to understand the concept of ‘genre’, which will help identify the foci of genre study. ‘Genre’ is a key concept that has been discussed by many scholars (e.g., [24]). Perhaps the most famous definition is that given by [20], who claims that a genre is characterized by its ‘communicative purposes’ and also embodied in its pattern of ‘structure, style, content and intended audience.’ As [25] succinctly summarizes, a genre can be defined as ‘a class of texts characterized by a specific communicative function that tends to produce distinctive structural patterns.’

Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that the genre has two traits. First, a genre serves a specific communicative purpose, e.g., Abstract is used to summarize the main idea of research articles, and thus it can be seen as a genre. The other distinctive feature of ‘genre’ is the particular pattern through which the communicative purpose is achieved. In other words, texts of the same genre share similarities in terms of organizational and linguistic characteristics. Identifying these features and applying them in EAP pedagogy is the value of genre analysis. However, the existing research tends to merely focus on generic structure of a genre, but does not attempt to study the linguistic features of that genre, or vice versa. Moreover, it is seldom made clear how genre research findings can be incorporated into pedagogical practice. Realizing these research gaps, this essay aims to study TESOL Abstract in depth and provide effective suggestions for EAP pedagogy.

3. Methods

This section describes how the study was conducted. It firstly shows how and why the thirty abstracts were selected. Then, it explains the foci and the significance of the move analysis in this research. After that, it justifies the unit of analysis of this study.

3.1. Abstract Selection

Thirty abstracts (with each less than 200 words in length as required) were randomly selected from the Feature Articles in the issues of *TESOL Journal* (2016, Volume 7, Issue 1 to 2023, Volume 14, Issue 1). The purpose of doing so is to control diachronic changes and differences caused by column features and journal requirements. In addition, *TESOL Journal* is a prestigious journal, the articles on which can be seen as high-quality examples.

3.2. Move Analysis Approach

This study adopted move analysis approach to conduct genre analysis. In the area of EAP, [20]'s move analysis is one of the most influential means of genre analysis, with 'move' indicating a part of the text that performs a kind of communicative function [26]. Through move analysis approach, several models of research article Abstract have been discovered:

- (1) Problem — Methods — Results — Conclusion [27];
- (2) Background (optional) — Purpose — Methods — Results — Conclusion [28];
- (3) Purpose — Methods — Results — Conclusion [29];
- (4) Introduction — Methods — Results — Discussion [20];
- (5) Introduction — Methods — Results — Discussion (empirical TESOL abstracts; [30]);
- (6) Introduction (Background & Problem) — Purpose — Methods — Results — Conclusion [31];
- (7) Introduction — Purpose — Methods — Results — Conclusion [32].

It can be summarized that there are at least following possible abstract moves: Background, Problem, Purpose, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion. Introduction is excluded here because it is not a single move, but an overarching concept. According to [20]'s CARS (Create A Research Space) model, article Introduction consists of three moves: Establishing a territory, Establishing a niche, and Occupying a niche, which correspond to 'Background, Problem, and Purpose' identified above. Since the purpose of this essay is to explore the TESOL Abstract in detail, we chose to do move analysis descriptively, rather than prescriptively. Instead, we coded the selected abstracts with possible moves summarized above. If a new move occurred, we gave it an extra coding.

In addition to generic structure, non-native English speakers also need to master key linguistic features of texts in order to read and write successfully. Many researchers have studied the organizational patterns through move analysis (e.g., [35]), while some others have focused on lexical-grammatical features (e.g., [20]). However, there is no much research combining organizational patterns and linguistic features together. To provide more pedagogically useful information, this study also analyzed lexical-grammatical features of each move. In this way, this study is not only able to present the global structure of TESOL Abstract, but also reveal how each move is written. The key linguistic features focused on in this research are move signals/discourse markers and tenses of moves. Move signals help learners quickly grasp the key information and easily produce texts of similar kind. Tense was studied because it is an intractable issue that confounds a great number of non-native English speakers.

3.3. Unit of Analysis

There are many units of move analysis, such as sentence, T-unit, clause (finite & infinite), phrase,

etc. The unit of sentence is preferred by many for it is handy and laborsaving. Nevertheless, moves may be embedded in clauses or phrases in many cases [33]. Even so, it is not recommendable to do analysis at clause or phrase level because too much trivial information may result in futility and confusion. It seems attractive to have an idea unit of analysis, but it is difficult to find such a unit reliably. Therefore, we abandoned the idea of searching for a precisely defined unit of analysis, and deliberately chose a flexible unit favored by [28], *element*.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion from two aspects: the generic structure of Abstract and the linguistics features of Abstract moves. Finally, the findings are briefly summarized.

4.1. Generic Structure

The move patterns of the thirty abstracts are as below:

(1) Research topic, Method, Purpose, Methods, Results, Conclusion; (2) Background, Purpose, Methods, Results; (3) Method, Gap, Method, Research topic, Method, Results, Purpose
(**New moves are underscored.*)

It is noticeable that all the abstracts include these core moves: Purpose, Methods, and Results. Research topic and Gap are two new moves occurring in the selected abstracts. In addition to the three core moves, the selected abstracts also share a similarity in terms of optional moves. Research topic in the first and third abstract, Background in the second abstract, and Gap in the third abstract can be summarized with an overarching term, Introduction. As clarified in the Section 3.2, Background corresponds to the first move of article introduction section. Similarly, according to [20]'s CARS model, claiming Research topic is the same as Step 1B in the third move of article introduction section; indicating Gap is the same as Step 1B in the second move of that. Therefore, it can be concluded that in Abstract section, Introduction is an 'umbrella move' that includes several sub-moves. Considering the analysis in the Section 3.2 and the findings through move analysis, sub-moves of Introduction include but may not limit to Background, Problem, Purpose, Research topic, and Gap. However, Purpose seems to be vital so that it enjoys the status of core move.

By far, the generic structure of TESOL Abstract can be identified: Introduction, Purpose, Method, Results, and Conclusion (optional). Except for Discussion, this pattern generally reflects the main content of research articles, though not necessarily in the same order as them. This discovery is slightly different from [20]'s finding that 'most abstracts reflect the IMRD (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion) pattern of the RA (research article) itself' and the same IMRD pattern of empirical TESOL research Abstract discovered by [30]. Compared with [20]'s and [30]'s IMRD model, the current model does not have Discussion move, but adds Purpose and Conclusion. This pattern is most similar with Abstract models found by [27], [31], and [32] which also contain those five moves. The differences are that the Introduction move in model has a broader concept and that the Conclusion move is optional.

Generally speaking, there are several points worth noticing concerning the move model discovered in this study. Firstly, it lacks generalizability due to the limited research samples. Secondly, controversy goes to Conclusion. While most of the existing Abstract models include Conclusion move, here only one abstract has this move. If more samples are studies, it can be made clear whether Conclusion is an important move in TESOL Abstract. Thirdly, Introduction is an 'umbrella move' containing many sub-moves. Not all of its sub-moves occur in an abstract. Fourthly, as it can be seen from the above summary, there is no fixed order of those moves.

4.2. Linguistic Features

Two of the linguistics features are explored in this study, namely, move signals and tenses of moves.

4.2.1 Move signals

Move signals are a prominent feature of Abstract language. In most cases, there are signals indicating moves, which can be either particular lexis or grammatical structures. They are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1: Move signals

Move	Move signals
Introduction	... focuses on ...; ... explores ...; ..., this article addresses the significant gap ...; ... looks into ...
Purpose	... aims to ...
Methods	... by looking into ...; The study adopted qualitative data collection procedures ...; Data <u>were obtained</u> from ...; ... <u>was designed and implemented</u> ...; Drawing on ...; ... by probing ...; ... by tracing ...
Results	The findings of this study show that ...; The results indicated ...; <i>It raises questions about ... & ... examines ... (*exception)</i>
Conclusion	... should therefore ...

From the above summary, it is clear that there are typical languages of moves, viz. move signals. ‘Focus on’, ‘explore’, ‘look into’ are the signals of announcing research topics. Research gap is also explicitly stated with generic language ‘this article addresses the significant gap ...’. The way of indicating purposes is less diverse. All of the thirty abstracts in this study use the same phrase ‘aim to’ to show purpose. In other research that involves larger sample size, it is also found that Purpose move is often signaled by the grammatical structure ‘to +infinite verb’, e.g., [33]. As for Methods move, there are various lexical signals indicating actions taken in the study process, such as ‘adopt’, ‘obtain’, ‘design’, ‘implement’, etc. Unlike other moves, there are two passive forms in Methods. While [27] claims that Abstract is characterized by passive voice, this study finds that passive voice is far less common than passive voice in Abstract. In addition to lexical devices, grammatical signals also occur frequently in Methods. The typical grammatical structure of Methods is ‘by + V-ing’, such as ‘by looking into’, ‘by probing’, and ‘by tracing’. Compared with the move signals of Methods, those of Results are simple and fixed. Results signals are usually generic expressions, such as ‘the finding of this study show that ...’, which evidently convey the meaning of ‘results’. However, there is an exception in the third abstract. The language ‘It raises questions about ... and ... examines ...’ is a typical expression claiming research topic, but the meaning in that abstract is concerning results according to its context. The last move signal ‘should therefore’ distinctly indicates ‘suggestion’, which belongs to the move of Conclusion.

It is of pedagogical significance to identify those move signals. Firstly, move signals help quickly realizing the content of Abstract, thereby promoting the understanding of the article. This is particularly valuable for non-native English speakers, because it is not easy for them to read academic literature in a foreign language. Further, using those move signals is a simple but effective way to produce qualified abstracts.

4.2.2. Tenses of moves

It is accepted that ‘abstracts are ex post facto’ [20], and they are ‘characterized by the use of past tense’ [27]. However, this study finds that Abstract is not dominated by past tense (see Table 2).

According to the above table, there are three tenses in Abstract: present simple, past simple, and ‘neutralized tense’. It is understandable that Introduction and Purpose are written in present simple tense, because they are not influenced by time. Methods move is supposed described in past tense, because it is written after conducting research. [34] found that past tense is highly frequently used in

Methods section. While this is true in the current Methods move, it is also found that ‘neutralized tense’ is common. [35] points out that tenses are neutralized with modal verbs, such as ‘should’ in the Conclusion move. In the same vein, we see ‘prep+V-ing’ as a way of neutralizing tenses, because this structure makes the verb lose the function of indicating time. In Results, both present simple and past simple tenses are used. However, present simple is more common. Since there is only one example of Conclusion, no further discussion can be made. Through the above analysis, it is clear that tenses in Abstract vary with move types. This is probably the reason why tense in Abstract is a long-lasting problem for non-native English learners.

Table 2: Tenses of moves

Move	Tenses	Examples
Introduction	<u>Present simple</u>	Focuses on; explores; is; addresses; looks into
Purpose	<u>Present simple</u>	Aim(s) to
Methods	<i>Past simple</i>	Took place; were; planned; provided; was
	Neutralized	By looking into; Drawing on; by probing; by tracing
Results	<u>Present simple</u>	Show; experience; raises; examines
	<i>Past simple</i>	Were; indicated
Conclusion	Neutralized	Should

4.3. Summary

This study finds the generic move pattern of research article Abstract in TESOL: Introduction, Purpose, Method, Results, and Conclusion (optional). These moves do not necessarily occur in order but basically cover the main content of research articles. In accordance with set moves of Abstract, there are also many fixed languages for them, which can be used to inform pedagogical practice. Moreover, it is also found that tenses are related to move types. It is inadvisable to summarize that the abstract as a whole is characterized by whatever tense.

5. Pedagogical Applications

While research findings have been summarized, this section moves further to discuss how the genre analysis results can be applied in EAP/ESP teaching. The pedagogical applications of genre analysis are crucially important. Without proper teaching practice, the research findings cannot exert desired effects on non-native English speakers in reality.

In terms of genre pedagogy, there is a controversy concerning whether genre knowledge should be taught explicitly or not. On the one hand, many support that genre knowledge should be acquired naturally through immersion in texts (e.g., [36]). On the other hand, it is believed that explicit teaching of genre knowledge can benefit students to a larger extent (e.g., [37]), and leaving students to learn how language works on themselves is likely to result in failure [37]. While the value of acquiring genre knowledge through exposure to readings cannot be ignored, it is probably more helpful for novice learners (pre-service/novice TESOL practitioners in this case) to learn the rudiments of genre knowledge through explicit teaching. After being ushered into this area, they will be able to develop academic or professional reading and writing skills on their own. For this reason, two approaches of informing EAP/ESP pedagogy with the genre study findings are recommended next.

‘Teaching-learning cycle’ is a widely recognized model for explicit genre instruction [38]. In light of the model, the genre research findings can be incorporated into EAP pedagogy as follows:

(1) Modeling: The teacher presents the research findings, including what moves the texts have, how these moves are organized, and the lexical-grammatical features (move signals and tenses in this study) of each move; (2) Joint negotiation of text: Based on the shared genre knowledge presented in the first step, the teacher and learners jointly produce an abstract for a TESOL research article. To

conduct this activity in class, the teacher need to prepare such an article (with its abstract deleted) in advance, and ask learners to read it before the class in order to increase classroom efficiency; (3) Independent construction of text: Drawing on the learnt genre knowledge and the practice in the last step, students are now given an opportunity to produce a new text of the taught genre on their own. Similar with Step 2, articles for abstract writing should be prepared and read by learners in advance.

These three steps follow traditional FLT (Foreign Language Teaching) activity sequencing pattern: Presentation, Practice, and Production [39]. In the first two steps, much guidance from the teacher is involved, because ‘language acquisition . . . is really highly interventionist’ [40]. Through teacher-led scaffolding instructions, students can finally master the know-how of the taught genre.

The other teaching design is enlightened by [20]’s task-based genre approach. Four sequential tasks are adapted from [20]’s illustration of task-oriented pedagogical approach.

(1) Jigsaw reading: The teacher splits the thirty abstracts sentence by sentence or move by move, and then asks learners to organize the split texts into original abstracts. In this way, learners will understand what constitutes an abstract and how the components are organized; (2) Identifying moves: After listing possible moves of Abstract (c.f., Section 3.2), the teacher asks learners to identify moves in the thirty abstracts. Then, the learners compare the moves of the thirty abstracts and conclude a move pattern with the teacher; (3) Examining linguistic features: Similar to what has been done in this study, students are asked to identify linguistic features of each move. Then, students and the teacher make a summary together; (4) Revising bad examples: Teachers purposefully prepare some bad examples of abstracts in advance. Students are asked to revise those examples according to the previously summarized Abstract move model and linguistic features of moves. This activity aims to consolidate learners understanding of Abstract moves.

The above four tasks do not only help learners understand the genre features of Abstract, but also grant them with genre analysis skills. The transferable skills would be of great benefits in learners’ academic or professional development. However, these tasks do not include hands-on practice of writing an abstract. To address this problem, the second and the third activities of the ‘teaching-learning cycle’ can be implemented subsequently.

6. Conclusion

Motivated by the pedagogical significance of genre analysis in EAP/ESP, the current study analyzed thirty research article abstracts in TESOL with genre analysis approach, aiming to serve non-native pre-service/novice English teachers. It is found that TESOL Abstract generally includes these moves: Introduction, Purpose, Method, Results, and Conclusion (optional). In addition, move signals are common in Abstract and the tenses in Abstract vary with moves. Finally, two teaching designs were recommended on how these findings can be utilized to inform EAP/ESP pedagogy. The task-based genre approach proposed in this essay endows learners with both genre knowledge and genre skills. The pedagogy based on ‘teaching-learning cycle’ facilitates learners to write qualified abstracts step by step. In real teaching practice, the two methods can be used synthetically to yield maximum benefits.

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