

A Rhetorical Move Analysis of TEFL Thesis Abstracts: The Case of Allameh Tabataba'i University

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Abstract

Abstract in every research paper has always been functioning as an attention-grabber which can encourage readers to keep reading the research or to dissuade it. Although abstracts are believed to play an important role in distributing the research findings, few studies have been done to evaluate the rhetorical organization of thesis abstracts, especially in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Thus, the purpose of the present study was to analyze the rhetorical moves of the MA thesis abstracts written from 1988 to 2015 in the field of TEFL in Allameh Tabataba'i University (ATU), an Iranian university. To this end, 300 MA thesis abstracts were analyzed based on Hyland's (2000) rhetorical move framework. To track the rhetorical move trends of the thesis abstracts and for the ease of analysis, they were analyzed in three time intervals. The results revealed that while in the first interval (1988-1997) the most frequent rhetorical moves were the "Purpose", "Method", and "Product", in the other two intervals (1998-2007 and 2008-2015) the "Purpose" was the most used rhetorical move. In addition, the least frequent rhetorical moves were the "Introduction" and "Conclusion" for the three intervals. The findings, on top of these, indicated that the rhetorical move patterns of thesis abstracts moved from Purpose-Method-Product (P-M-Pr) to Introduction-Purpose-Method-Product-Conclusion (I-P-M-Pr-C). That said, it can be concluded that in the examined thesis abstracts, the highest average of information was provided on the "Purpose" of the study, while the other moves, especially the conclusion move, was not deemed important; moreover, an increasing rate of information provision was detected on the "Method" and "Product" moves. This research bears some implications for L2 learners to better know their community of practice and writing instructors to prepare genre-based writing materials.

Keywords: move analysis, TEFL, rhetorical moves, thesis abstracts

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INTRODUCTION

It is the unique function of research abstracts that convinced many researchers to conduct different investigations about them (Doró, 2013). This, in one respect, conveys the fact that research abstracts are one of the pivotal sections in academic research (Bonn & Swales, 2007; Doró, 2013; Marefat & Mohammadzadeh, 2013; Saboori & Hashemi, 2013). To show the significant function of the research abstracts, Lorés (2004, p. 281) calls them as “the gateway that leads readers to take up an article, journals to select contributions or organizers of conferences to accept or reject papers.” Moreover, to indicate the important role of research abstracts, Doró (2013) refers to them as “a lens through which research becomes available to larger audiences” (p. 119). In Hyland’s (2000) view, abstract is the first part the reader reads; therefore, the abstract may persuade the reader to continue or stop reading the paper. Thus, it is not odd to consider a “gatekeeping function” for research abstracts, as Porush (1995, p. 76) declares. Logically, thesis abstracts are important sections possessing the same functions as research titles in that both of them have a “gatekeeping function.” They may help the readers to decide whether to read the whole thesis or not. Given that, the importance of rhetorical move analysis of research thesis abstracts is clearly justifiable (Hyland, 2000; Pho, 2008).

However, to investigate research abstracts structure and rhetorical organization in different academic communities, various models and guidelines on how to analyze, write and structure the research abstracts have been proposed (e.g., Doró, 2013; Esfandiari, 2014). In one of the earliest models, Swales (1981) proposed a four-move model for examining research abstracts. His model includes (1) Establishing the field; (2) Reporting previous research; (3) Preparing for the present research, and (4) Introducing the present research. Swales (1990) revisited his first move analysis model and proposed a three-move model and called it Create a Research Space (CARS). This model includes (1) establishing a territory; (2) Establishing a niche; and (3) Occupying the niche. Swales’ (1990) move analysis model led to other models proposed by other researchers (Cotos, Huffman & Link, 2015). Given that, various modifications have been proposed into Swales’ model. Bhatia (1994) suggested a four-move model including (1) Introducing the purpose; (2) Describing the methodology; (3) Summarizing the results, and (4) Presenting the conclusions. This model was acknowledged by

researchers such as Santos (1996) and Promsin (2006). Hyland (2000) offered a five-move model including (1) Introduction; (2) Purpose; (3) Method; (4) Product; and (5) Conclusion. According to Saboori and Hashemi (2013), the separation of the purpose from the introduction in Hyland's model is due to the different roles which these two sections play in research abstracts.

Using the aforementioned move analysis models, many researchers have investigated the abstract section of research articles in different disciplines (e.g. Promsin, 2006; Ren & Li, 2011; Stotesbury, 2003). Research abstracts in applied linguistics were also examined in the studies done by Lorés (2004) and Pho (2008) for their linguistic realization of rhetorical structures. Besides, schematic structures of research articles, including the abstract section, were studied by Hyland (2004). Moreover, research abstracts in other fields of study, such as biology and medicine were investigated for their writing conventions (e.g. Hartley, 2004; Samraj, 2005). Lon, Tan, and Abdullah's (2012) study opted to focus on research abstracts in computer science. Additionally, many comparative studies (e.g., Jalilifar & Vahid Dastjerdi, 2010; Marefat & Mohammadzadeh, 2013; Stotesbury, 2003), examined research abstracts among different disciplines in terms of cross-disciplinary studies.

Furthermore, move analysis of research abstracts has found its way in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Atai (2013) and Paltridge (2013) considered move analysis of research abstracts as a source of instruction in the realm of ESP. However, the purpose of the mentioned studies was to investigate the moves of research abstracts, thus, there is a paucity of data on the move analysis of thesis abstracts, especially in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Hence, the impetus of this study was to investigate the moves of TEFL thesis abstracts from the very day of the establishment of the MA program in Allameh Tabataba'i University from 1988 to 2015.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While some researchers think of research abstracts as the capture of the essence of research articles (e.g., Hartley, 2004; Pho, 2008; Salager-Meyer, 1990), other researchers differentiate research abstracts as the summarization of research articles (Lorés, 2004; Nwogu, 1990). Research abstracts can be referred to "as a distinct genre in academic

writing” (Doró, 2013, p. 121) which researchers seize to achieve their academic writing needs. Owing to this, Lorés (2004) believed that research abstracts are different in their functioning when compared to other sections of the research articles. However, the existing difference should not be interpreted as a restricted borderline among these three since they have effects on each other.

The term “move” in move analysis is “a functional term that refers to a defined and bounded communicative act that is designed to contribute to one main communicative objective, that of the whole text” (Lorés, 2004, p. 282). Other definitions are also given: Santos (1996, p. 485) attributes move to “a genre stage which has a particular, minor communicative purpose to fulfill, which in turn serves the major communicative purpose of the genre.” Swales (2004, pp. 228-9) refers to move as a “discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse.” Ding (2007) adds that a move is a tool to identify the textual regularity in different genres. While there is not a unified move analysis type to address different sections of research in general and research abstracts in particular, it is the most applicable way to investigate this genre (Crookes, 1986; Lewin, Fine, & Young, 2001). Sticking to the definition of “move” provided by Connor, Davis and De Rycker (1995, p. 463) in which “move” is the identification of the textual regularities to “describe the functions which particular portions of the text realizes in the relationship to the overall task”, Ding (2007) posited that a conducive tool in genre analysis is move analysis because this tool can help us to identify the moves which are semantic and functional units of texts.

The majority of studies done on research abstracts had a discourse analytic focus (Bonn & Swales, 2007). The studies addressing discourse analytic considerations concentrated on move analysis of research abstracts (e.g. Dahl, 2004; Hyland, 2000; Jordan, 1991; Santos, 1996). Salager-Meyer (1991) conducted a study to investigate the discoursal elements of medical research abstracts. The findings of her study did not show the existence of important discoursal elements in the investigated research abstracts. Moreover, in a study on the research abstracts written by Brazilian researchers, Johns (1991) found out that those researchers had the tendency to transfer their first language features, among them, are the discoursal elements, inappropriately to English research abstracts.

The structural variations of research abstracts across different disciplines have been investigated in multiple studies. Samraj (2005), for instance, conducted a comparative study on the research abstracts of conservation biology and wildlife behavior. She selected 24 research abstracts from two journals associated with the types of investigated disciplines. The first phase of her study showed no difference in the move analysis of the research abstracts in the two disciplines. The research abstracts of the two disciplines showed a move pattern of Purpose-Method-Results-Conclusion (PMRC). Nevertheless, the second phase of her study showed that the rhetorical structure in conservative biology included another move, namely Introduction which was not seen in the wildlife behavior. Samraj (2005) draws the conclusion that even close disciplines in terms of content might differ in their research abstracts rhetorical structures.

In a similar vein, a study conducted by Pho (2008) addressed the rhetorical structure and linguistic realization of research abstracts in the three journals of applied linguistics and educational technology, namely *Modern Language Journal*, *TESOL Quarterly*, and *Computers and Education*. After examining 30 research abstracts, the researcher found out that (1) Presenting the research, (2) Describing the methodology, and (3) Summarizing the results were the three obligatory moves in the research abstracts of the mentioned journals. Similar to Samraj (2005), Pho concluded that the variety of rhetorical structures could be seen even in the research abstracts of the related disciplines.

In a similar manner, Tseng (2011) investigated the move structure of research abstracts in three applied linguistics journals, namely *TESOL Quarterly*, *Applied Linguistics*, and *Language Learning*. Using Santos' (1996) five-move pattern to analyze the move pattern of the selected research abstracts, Tseng (2011) figured out that except for Background move, other moves such as Aim-Method-Result-Conclusion (AMRC), were obligatory in the research abstracts.

To address one of the existing gaps in the literature of rhetorical move analysis of the research abstracts, Suntara and Usaha (2013) conducted an analysis of the research abstracts of two related fields: linguistics and applied linguistics. They examined the rhetorical move structure of 200 research abstracts in the mentioned fields. The results of their study revealed that while in applied linguistics there were four conventional moves (Introduction-Purpose-Method-Product), there were three such moves in research abstracts of linguistics (Purpose-Method-

Product). However, to the best knowledge of the researchers, few studies have been conducted on the thesis abstracts of TEFL. That said, the current study was an attempt to address this gap.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was an attempt to investigate the rhetorical moves of TEFL thesis abstracts defended from 1988 to 2015 at the Department of English Language and Literature, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran. One rationale for this study was the dynamicity of genre during different time intervals (Swales, 1990). Owing to this, time can be an effective factor in mixing different genres together and finally in changing the rhetorical move structure of thesis abstracts (Ayers, 2008; Bhatia, 1997). Furthermore, it should be stated that MA degree in TEFL was first started in 1988 in this university. Moreover, during each interval, a generation of TEFL instructors and professors with different orientations and research interests was in charge of the English Department; therefore, it affected the MA students' theses and research orientations as well. In this regard, this study was aimed to address two main purposes (1) to examine the rhetorical move structure of the thesis abstracts done in TEFL so as to investigate the information provided by thesis abstracts, diachronically, and (2) to obtain the rhetorical move patterns of the thesis abstracts during different time intervals. To address these concerns, the following research questions were posed:

1. What is the rhetorical move structure of the abstracts in the MA thesis of TEFL written from 1988 to 2015 at Allameh Tabataba'i University?
2. What is the most frequent rhetorical move pattern in the abstracts of the MA thesis of TEFL written from 1988 to 2015 at Allameh Tabataba'i University?

METHOD

The Corpus

One factor that made this study different from the previous studies was the corpus it used. Previous studies on research abstracts included a very limited number of abstracts. In terms of abstract selection, the present study, unlike the previous studies, considered all MA thesis abstracts.

The corpus of this study included 300 thesis abstract written by MA students of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) from 1988 to 2015 at Allameh Tabataba'i University (ATU). The corpus was collected through visiting ATU digital library system: <http://d-lib.atu.ac.ir/faces/home.jspx>. Moreover, the paper version of the thesis was also considered to check for any possible mismatch. It should be stated that the number of thesis conducted from 1988 to 2015 at Allameh Tabataba'i University was 332; however, by matching the digital versions with the print versions of the thesis, it was found that 23 thesis did not have any abstract and that the digital versions of nine thesis were not available. Thus, the final corpus consisted of 300 thesis abstracts. Then, the selected abstracts were divided into three time intervals (every nine years was considered an interval) to have a sufficient number of abstracts for the purpose of analysis and comparison. The first time interval, which started from 1988 and ended in 1997, contained 50 thesis abstracts. The second time interval was from 1998 to 2007 and contained 115 thesis abstracts. Finally, the third time interval, from 2008 to 2015, included 135 thesis abstracts.

Data Analysis Framework

To do the rhetorical move analysis of the thesis abstracts, Hyland's (2000) five-move model was chosen. The rationale behind this selection was that for creating his five-move model, Hyland (2000) investigated 800 research abstracts. Consequently, this model is shown to be more powerful to address abstract rhetorical move structure in comparison to other models (Suntara & Usaha, 2013). Hyland's (2000) five-move model consists of the following constituent steps:

1. Introduction: establishes context of the paper and motivates the research.
 - Step 1. Arguing for topic prominence,
 - Step 2. Making topic generalizations,
 - Step 3. Defining terms, objects, or processes, and
 - Step 4. Identifying a gap in current knowledge
2. Purpose: indicates purpose, thesis or hypothesis, outlines the intention behind the paper.
 - Step 1. Stating the purpose directly

3. Method: provides information on design, procedures, assumptions, approach, data, etc.
 - Step 1. Describing the participants,
 - Step 2. Describing the instruments or equipment, and
 - Step 3. Describing the procedure and conditions
4. Product: states main findings or results, the argument, or what was accomplished.
 - Step 1. Describing the main features or properties of the solution or product
5. Conclusion: interprets or extends results beyond the scope of the paper, draws inferences, points to applications, or wider applications.
 - Step 1. Deducing conclusions from results,
 - Step 2. Evaluating value of the research, and
 - Step 3. Presenting recommendations

It should be stated that move embedding is inevitable when coding rhetorical moves in the research abstracts (Bhatia, 1994; Santos, 1996). It happens when one sentence is addressing more than one move. In Samraj's (2005, p. 146) words "a sentence may sometimes be a realization of more than one move." To address this issue in the current study, the sentences showing move embedding were coded as dual or more moves. In this regard, when counting the number of moves based on the aforementioned framework, the sentences with move embedding were taken into consideration.

As it was mentioned, the 300 thesis abstracts were divided into three intervals. The first time interval was from 1988 to 1997. There were 50 thesis conducted during this time interval in TEFL at the MA level. An example of a thesis abstract in this time interval has been shown below (*Researcher: Pooran Nazemi, 1992*):

Introduction:

(Arguing for topic prominence) An EST paragraph has as its purpose the transmission of information (fact or hypothesis) from writers to readers. Thus, it uses only a limited number of rhetorical functions.

(Defining terms, objects, or processes) "Definition" as an important and frequently employed rhetorical function in EST discourse, may appear in elementary texts like textbooks for beginners as well as in more advanced discourse when new concept or technology needs explanation

Purpose:

(Stating the purpose directly) This study investigated the role of explicit and implicit definition in reading English as well as Farsi Scientific texts

Method:

In this regard, the following questions were asked: 1l what is the difference between the explicit vs. implicit way of expressing information from the reader's viewpoint? 2a Do Iranian students find implicit definition problematic when they read English texts? 3rDo learners have difficulty understanding an implicit information when they read Farsi texts? 4e Does language have any auxiliary role in increasing the level of comprehension of scientific texts? The Participants...

Product:

(Describing the main features or properties)The results of this study suggest that explicit / implicit distinction will disappear, in case the students have no problem with language. That is, the more experience he students have with language, the more success they will have at the implicit definition.

Conclusion:

(Deducing conclusions from results) It is not surprising then, that the first null hypothesis was rejected. Here, the language was foreign to Ss, while the second null hypothesis was confirmed and the students reading Farsi paragraphs of implicit / explicit definition had nearly similar performance.

This thesis abstract is one of the fewest ones conducted during the first time interval containing all the five moves proposed by Hyland (2000). As can be seen, the researcher started her thesis abstract by arguing for the importance of the topic, then, she provided a broad definition of the topic. She, next, declared her thesis purpose in one sentence. The method move of her thesis abstract is started by raising some questions, probably related to the research questions of her thesis. Then, she introduced the participants of her study. The product move was also addressed by referring to the results. Moreover, the researcher described the main features of the results. Finally, the researcher addressed the conclusion move by the deduction she made from her thesis results.

As it was stated earlier, not many of the thesis abstracts of the first time interval (1988 to 1997) contained all the rhetorical moves proposed by Hyland (2000). Below, there is an extract of a thesis abstract containing three rhetorical moves (*Researcher: Parviz Yousefi, 1992*):

Purpose:

(Stating the purpose directly) This study investigated the different in validity, reliability, and students' performance on four C - test texts with varying difficulty levels.

Method:

(Describing the participants MIXED with instruments and procedures) The experimental sample was taken from among junior EFL Iranian university students in Tehran. In addition, the subjects were required to take the test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as the criterion measure for validity studies, one week after they had taken the C - test. The main research questions of this study dealt with the following issues: 1. the statistical characteristics of the study C - test texts. 2. The degree of correspondence between the students' performance on each C - test and the whole C - test on the one hand and these and total as well as the subparts of TOEFL on the other hand. 3. The possible differences between the means of the four C - test texts.

Product:

(Describing the main features or properties) The result indicated that there were no significant different in the magnitude of correlation coefficients between each of the four C -test texts and the TOEFL. Thus, text difficulty did not affect the validity of the C - test texts in this study. The reliabilities of the C - test texts were estimated through the application of KR - 21 formula reliability. Moreover, the reliability of the whole C - test was calculated separately using Cronbach's Alpha. The results showed that the text difficulty had no influence on the reliability of C - test texts.

The second time interval started from 1998 to 2007. One hundred and fifteen theses were conducted during this period. All of the thesis abstracts of this interval were subject to analysis based on Hyland's (2000) five-move model to achieve their rhetorical move structure. The extract of an abstract containing the five moves is shown below (Researcher: Jaleh Hassaskhah, 2000):

Introduction:

(Arguing for topic prominence): Across the nation, testing system powerfully affect curriculum, instruction, school cultures, and the quality of education delivered to our nation's students. They can either support important learning or undermine it

Purpose:

(Outlines the intention behind the paper): This study evaluates how well such assessment systems manifest student learning.

Method:

(MIXED: instrument, participants, and procedures): To gather data, the researcher used surveys, follow - up interviews, and various documents to investigate the behaviors a group of college students manifested to complete a portion of a standardized reading comprehension test. Data analysis resulted in the identification of three broad categories of processing behavior: an overall approach to the task, reading strategies, and test taking strategies. In addition, difficulties encountered by the subjects were identified.

Product:

(Describing the main features or properties): Results indicate that the common element in each subject's approach to the was a focus on getting to the questions as quickly as possible and then using questions to direct at each of the passage to locate the best possible information to answer the questions

Conclusion:

(Presenting recommendations): The implications of these results for better understanding the relationship between test - taking behaviors and reading are discussed.

However, not all the abstracts in this time interval demonstrated the five moves proposed by Hyland (2000). There were diversities in the abstracts with regard to the moves they contained. The extract of a thesis abstract containing four moves is shown below (*Researcher: Ebrahim Kazempoor, 2003*):

Purpose:

(Outlines the intention behind the paper): The purpose of the present study is to investigate an instructional design model, namely phonological awareness training, which is aimed at improving listening comprehension skills among Iranian adult learners in intermediate level

Method:

(Describing the instruments or equipment AND condition): The model is grounded in schema theory, and set against a background of research into complexities of listening comprehension, awareness raising activities, authentic texts, phonological feature, and reduced forms of speech. Reading the first research question, the observed *t* - value exceeded the critical *t*-value at 0.05 level of significant. As for the second research question, which was to determine the impact of phonological awareness

training on different proficiency levels, the application of 2 - way ANOVA and Post Hoc Scheffe Test showed that there was a meaningful difference across different levels.

Product:

(Describing the main features or properties): The finding of this study showed that phonological awareness training had a positive impact on the enhancement of listening comprehension of the students

Conclusion:

(Presenting the Recommendation): This can be of important value for both the teachers and material developers. The former can help learners by sensitizing them to phonological features such as stress and intonation, which contain important clues to the meaning of spoken language. The later can design and accommodate appropriate activities in the textbook to help learners improve their listening skills.

Finally, the thesis abstracts of the third interval were analyzed for their rhetorical move structure. This interval started from 2007 to 2015 and contained 135 abstracts. The analysis of one of the abstracts containing the five moves is shown below (*Researcher: Ali Derakhshan, 2011*):

Introduction:

(Arguing for topic prominence): During the last several years, the growing interest in the teachability of pragmatics in a second or foreign language has been presented by a number of interventional studies that have examined the effectiveness of specific teaching methods.

(Identifying a gap in current knowledge): One such pragmatic feature is speech act. Speech acts are very important in being able to communicate in any language, yet second language learners are often not able to perform this vital aspect of communication which results in often cross-cultural miscommunications.

Purpose:

(Outlines the intention behind the paper): This study investigated the interventional effect of producing output in the context of instruction on developing second language pragmatic competence.

Method:

(Describing the participants): To this end, two types of data were collected at Jihad Daneshgahi of Tehran University from a total of 39 intermediate participants.

(Describing the instruments or equipment): These were written discourse completion task (WDCT) and metapragmatic awareness task (MPAT)...

(Describing the procedure and conditions): *the pre-test from both instruments showed no significant differences between the two groups, so the type of treatment was randomly assigned to the groups. The Output group listened to a dialog twice, answered reading comprehension questions and role-played the dialog using the note they had taken. The – Output group, on the other hand, listened to a dialog twice, answered reading comprehension questions and underlined the thanking strategy in the script of dialogs distributed to them. All the participants in both groups received a post-test in the same two forms taken for the pre-test.*

Product:

(Describing the main features or properties): *Comparison of the mean difference from pre-test to post-test results of WDCT revealed a significant improvement for the Output group but not the Output group...*

Conclusion:

(Deducing conclusions from results): *Overall, the present study provided evidence for the effect of an output-focused instructional treatment in the context of L2 pragmatic development.*

(Presenting the Recommendation): *As such, it offers support for Swain's (1995, 2005) Output Hypothesis in an area of second language development outside of morphosyntactic learning.*

Just like the thesis abstracts in other time intervals, not all the abstracts in the third time interval showed all the five rhetorical moves. Some of the abstracts were missing one or two moves. In the following extract a thesis abstract is shown containing four moves (*Behnaz Derakhshani, 2011*):

Purpose:

(Outlines the intention behind the paper): *This thesis analyzed gender in relation to turn-taking patterns in an English language institute in Iran.*

Method:

(Describing the instruments or equipment AND describing the procedure and conditions): *The data were collected through observing the actual classroom interaction among and between students and the teacher by the researcher and audio taping 20 sessions of these classes. The investigated elements of turns were eye contact, overlapping talk, taking and holding the floor, teacher turns, and the use of gambits. The frequencies of occurrence of these elements were subjected to a chi-square analysis to find out if there were any significant differences between the two genders.*

Product:

(Describing the main features or properties): The results showed that Iranian male students are more successful in turn-taking than female students.

Conclusion:

(Deducing conclusions from results): Thus, the null-hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the male and female students' use of turn-taking strategies is rejected.

Inter-Coder Reliability

Due to the heterogeneity in coders' codification, the threat to the reliability of the corpus studies is undeniable. Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Walker (2014) assert when doing a corpus analysis, it is highly important to run inter-coder reliability among the coders' codifications. That said, two raters, both MA holder in TEFL, coded the corpus. For each time interval 30% of the thesis abstracts were coded by the two raters for the matter of obtaining the inter-rater reliability indexes. One of the raters was one of the present researchers and the other one was held a PhD in TEFL with at least five years of experience in language teaching. It should be stated that prior to the coding to be started, the two raters had a briefing session and shared their understanding of the data analysis framework to enhance the agreement. Given that, Krippendorff's Alpha (KALPHA) was computed. De Swert (2012) believes that KALPHA includes all the known measurements' formulation criteria. Consequently, KALPHA is an appropriate reliability measure. In this study, KALPHA was computed using SPSS 19. The results showed a high index of reliability ($r=.82$) following Cohen's (1988) interpretation. Moreover for the first time interval the inter-rater reliability index was 0.78, for the second interval it was 0.86, and for the last interval it was 0.90. This can be due to coders' discussion and practice on Hyland's (2000) five-move model before starting to implement it on the thesis abstracts.

RESULTS

The first research question of this study was "What is the rhetorical structure of the abstracts of the MA thesis of TEFL conducted from 1988 to 2015 at Allameh Tabataba'i University?" Using Hyland's (2000) five-move model of rhetorical move structure, the percentages of

each move was obtained at different time intervals and from 1988 to 2015 (Table 1).

Table 1: The percentage of each move in different time intervals and overall from 1988 to 2015

Rhetorical move	1988-1997	1998-2007	2008-2015	Total: 1988-2015
Introduction	52%	35%	72%	54%
Purpose	74%	85%	92%	86%
Method	22%	54%	83%	61%
Product	74%	73%	89%	80%
Conclusion	14%	29%	56%	39%

(Note: The total is not equivalent to 300 (100%) due to move embedding.)

As Table (1) shows, in the first interval, from 1988 to 1987, most of the thesis abstracts contained the Purpose and Product moves (74%), while just 14% of the thesis abstracts contained the Conclusion move. This Table also shows that in the first interval 52% of the abstracts contained the Introduction move and 22% contained the Method move.

Table (1), moreover, indicates that 85% of the thesis abstracts in the second interval contained the Purpose move. Besides, this Table shows a declining rate in the percentage of the Introduction move (35%) and Product move (73%) in comparison with the first time interval. However, Table (1) indicates an increasing rate in the percentage of the Conclusion (29%) and Method (54%) moves compared with the first interval.

The results obtained from the MA thesis abstracts written in the third interval show that the Purpose move continues to have its increasing rate (92%). This increasing rate can also be seen in other moves (Introduction 72%; Product 89%; Method 82%; and Conclusion 56%). This indicates that the MA thesis abstracts in this time interval were more in line with Hyland's (2000) five move model.

Overall, the results of Table (1) indicate that most of the MA thesis abstracts from 1988 to 2015 contained the Purpose (86%) and Product

move (80%). Moreover, a fair percentage of the thesis abstracts contained the Method (61%) and Introduction moves (54%). The least paid attention move is Conclusion (39%) during 1988 to 2015.

The second research question of this study was “What is the most frequent rhetorical move pattern(s) of the abstracts in the TEFL thesis written from 1988 to 2015 in Allameh Tabataba’i University?” To address this question, the pattern of each thesis abstract was extracted. As Table (2) shows, four most used rhetorical move patterns seen in the thesis abstracts were Introduction-Purpose-Method-Product (I-P-M-Pr), Purpose-Method-Product-Conclusion (P-M-Pr-C), Purpose-Method-Product (P-M-Pr), and Hyland’s five move model (I-P-M-Pr-C).

Table 2: Rhetorical move patterns of thesis abstract from 1988 to 2015

Rhetorical move patterns	1988-1997	1998-2007	2008-2015	Total: 1988-2015
I-P-M-Pr	32%	48%	38%	45%
P-M-Pr-C	40%	51%	41%	62%
P-M-Pr	62%	54%	18%	40%
I-P-M-Pr-C	11%	32%	85%	56%

(Note: The total is not equivalent to 300 (100%) due to move embedding).

Table (2) shows that in the first time interval, from 1988 to 1997, most of the thesis abstracts followed a P-M-Pr model (62%). The least observed pattern in this time interval was, however, Hyland’s five move model (11%). The other two patterns (I-P-M-Pr 32%, P-M-Pr-C 40%) were fairly observed among the thesis abstracts of this time interval.

Table (2) indicates that except for the P-M-P model (54%), other patterns, i.e., I-P-M-Pr (48%), P-M-Pr-C (51%), I-P-M-Pr-C (32%) had an increasing rate of occurrence in the second interval from 1998 to 2007.

Comparing the third time interval, 2007 to 2015, with the other two time intervals resulted in interesting results. In the last interval, the thesis abstracts containing Hyland’s (2000) five move model increased in number from 32% in the second time interval to 85%. Moreover, with

regard to all the other move patterns, there can be seen a declining rate of percentage (I-P-M-Pr 38%, P-M-Pr-C 41%, P-M-Pr 18%).

Table (2) indicates that, as a whole, 62% of thesis abstracts followed the P-M-Pr-C move pattern from 1988 to 2015. Moreover, as an evolving move pattern, Hyland's (2000) five-move model was observed in the 56% of thesis abstracts. I-P-M-Pr and P-M-Pr move patterns occurred in 45% and 40% of the thesis abstracts and continued a decreasing rate of occurrence from 1988 to 2015.

DISCUSSION

This study was an attempt to probe the rhetorical moves of MA thesis abstracts of TEFL which were written from 1988 to 2015 at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran. The results of this study revealed discrepancies in the frequencies of different rhetorical moves of thesis abstracts during different time intervals. The information obtained from Table (1) indicates that the Purpose, Method, and Product moves were the most used moves in the thesis abstracts both during different time intervals and within these 27 years. This is in line with the studies by Ren and Li (2011) and Tseng (2011). By the same token, it can be stated that thesis abstracts provided most of the information on the purpose of thesis, the method used, and the obtained results.

Two explanations can be given for the fact that most of the content of the abstracts has been devoted to the Purpose, Method, and Product moves. First of all, these moves are common in all the rhetorical move patterns since Swales (1981) proposed the first model of move analysis; however, they are called with different terms such as Aim for Purpose and Result for Product. Consequently, as a habit in writing, students see these moves as the most important, and sometimes obligatory and crucial, elements in writing their thesis abstracts. Secondly, the moves in the abstracts are under the dominance of their counterpart sections in the thesis. Some very important sections in the thesis are Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method, and Results, which students need to pay their foremost attention to when writing their thesis and their thesis abstracts (Hyland, 2000). This might be another reason for the obtained results regarding the use of the three moves (Purpose, Method, and Product) in most of the thesis abstracts.

The other two moves, Introduction and Conclusion, did not come up in the frequency of occurrence as the three mentioned moves. These

results are compatible with that of Ren and Li (2011). The rationale for such results can be explained by the corpus of the study. As it was stated, the corpus of this study contained thesis abstracts from 1988. This is long before Hyland proposed his five move model in 2000, and these moves were not included in the previous rhetorical move models proposed before Hyland (2000). Moreover, after 2000, Hyland's five-move model needed some time to find its way in writing classrooms and to be established as a standard rhetorical move pattern in writing both research and thesis abstracts. Consequently, these two moves might be considered as the optional moves up to the third interval, 2007 to 2015. The obtained results from Table (1) show that a greater number of thesis abstracts in the third interval contained Introduction and Conclusion moves in comparison with the two previous intervals.

Moreover, one more explanation for the results with regard to Introduction and Conclusion can be given by sticking to the phenomenon of move embedding. Because of the essence of the Introduction move which is very close to the Purpose move, and the essence of the Conclusion move which is very close to the Product move, often the Introduction and Conclusion moves are embedded in the Purpose and Product moves, respectively (Suntara & Usaha, 2013).

The second question of this study asked about the rhetorical move patterns used in MA thesis abstracts during different time intervals and within the 27 years of the history of the MA program of TEFL at Allameh Tabataba'i University. The results of Table (2) revealed the rhetorical move patterns of thesis abstracts. Table (2) indicates that there were a controversy between Hyland's five-move model (I-P-M-Pr-C) and other rhetorical moves in that while I-P-M-Pr-C continued to have an increasing rate of occurrence from the first time interval to the last interval, other rhetorical moves, notably P-M-P, tended to have a decreasing rate in the same time intervals. The results, thus, are in contrast with Saboori and Hashemi (2013); however, it should be taken into account that they conducted move pattern analysis on *research* abstracts in applied linguistics. The results demonstrated that the thesis abstracts were going to be more in line with I-P-M-Pr-C which is compatible with Hyland's (2004) suggestion that more research abstracts include I-P-M-Pr-C pattern. The findings suggested that the thesis abstracts in applied linguistics conducted recently had the tendency to provide information on all the five moves more than the ones conducted in early 2000.

All things considered, the results of this study indicated that the abstracts of TEFL theses written from 1988 to 2015 at Allameh Tabataba'i University drew on different move patterns during different time intervals, paving the path to be more compatible with Hyland's (2000) five-move model. The findings of our study showed that after 2000 when Hyland proposed his model, MA students and researchers and their supervisors tried to be more in line with that model. By analyzing the three time intervals, it can be concluded that Hyland's model fit more with the thesis abstracts published after 2000, i.e., the second and third intervals. All in all, the connection between the four patterns and the three time intervals showed the high status of Hyland's (2000) model in writing MA thesis abstracts of TEFL from 2000 to 2015 in Allameh Tabataba'i University.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study supported the hypothesis that thesis abstracts provide different types of information about the thesis sections. Moreover, the results are supportive of the hypothesis that during different time intervals thesis abstract had different move patterns, thus, the findings are in line with the studies such as Swales (1990) and Ayers (2008). It can be concluded that in early 1990 the thesis abstracts were more in line with the three-move pattern of P-M-Pr, while in late 2015 the thesis abstracts tended to show I-P-M-Pr-C move pattern. In the course of analysis, this shows the higher tendency of the students and supervisors to include more information in their thesis abstracts.

It is worth mentioning that this study examined the abstracts of TEFL thesis conducted in one university, namely Allameh Tabataba'i University at the level of MA. Hence, further studies addressing the rhetorical move analysis of the thesis abstracts in different universities can also be insightful. Additionally, other studies can be done to investigate the rhetorical move structures of thesis abstracts in other areas of Applied Linguistics.

When considering thesis abstracts as a genre, the results of this study can have pedagogical implications for TEFL and applied linguistics students. According to Bhatia (1997) and Hyland (2002), by knowing about the genre of their field, students will be able to know their community of practice; this, in its place, can contribute to the novice writers to make use of the genre knowledge in order to write in a more

complex way. This will lead to a rise in genre knowledge and awareness of students which helps them to understand specific texts better (Loi & Evans, 2010). All these benefits may be obtained by analyzing the moves of thesis abstracts in classrooms. Moreover, as Pho (2008) states, the rhetorical structure of research abstracts can be instructed in the writing courses to prepare students to write for their professional community. Finally, the results of studies, and the present study can be used in the compilation of textbooks on how to write an abstract (Pho, 2008; Ventola, 1994).

Bio-data

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