A Matter of Who Writes: Generic Variations in Applied Linguists RAs by English vs. Persian Writers

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Abstract

Identifying the generic features of research articles in terms of moves has been a proliferating line of investigation in EAP. Swales' (1990) formulation of generic moves has particularly been enlightening in characterizing the scientific discourse in the research articles. The implications drawn from generic identification shed light on inter-disciplinary as well as intercultural (i.e. cross-linguistic) aspects of discourse production. The present study focused on the distinctions between 40 articles written in English by native English vs. the same number of articles written in English by native Persians regarding the move employment.

Keywords: EAP, article genre, applied linguistics RAs, generic variation, L1.

1. Introduction

Genre has been a thriving area of interest within applied linguistics. According to Cheng (2006)
As both a cognitive and a cultural concept, genre is often defined as the abstract, goal-oriented, staged, and socially recognized ways of using language delimited by communicative purposes, performed social (inter)actions within rhetorical contexts, and formal properties (structure, style, and content) . . . . (p. 77).
Such a definition, if narrowed down to specific discourses, can offer us analytical tool with which we can set about describing patterns of text organization "[Such an] approach to genre analysis . . . . will begin by identifying a genre within a discourse community and defining the communicative purposes the genre is designed to achieve" (Bawarshi & Reif, 2010, p. 46). It is along these very lines that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has ovr the years been quite proliferating in terms of genre-oriented literature (see Moshfeghi, 2010, for instance).
The tradition goes back to Swales' (1990) ground-breaking work and identification of generic structures in research article abstracts and introductions. As far as ESP is concerned, Swales (ibid) offers the most straightforward definition: "structured communicative events engaged in by specific

discourse communities whose members share broad communicative purposes'' (Swales, 1990). Genres, from this perspective, are seen as the locally established ways in which members of discourse community position themselves and their claims. Hyland (2002) states that

disciplines have different views of knowledge, different research practices, and different ways of seeing the world, and that these difference are reflected in diverse forms of argument and expression . . . . Essentially, academic writing is not a single undifferentiated mass, but a variety of subject-specific illiteracies. Through these literacies members of disciplines communicate with their peers, and students with their professors. The words they choose must present their ideas in ways that make most sense to their readers, and part of this involves adopting an appropriate identity (p. 352).

Genre-based approaches to discourse analysis have, in particular, informed us of multi-dimensional aspects of a text construction and inspired numerous studies of written and spoken genres such as research articles (Swales,1990), legal genre (Fredrickson, 1995), sales promotion letters (Connor and Mauranen, 1999), grant proposal (Connor and Mauranen, 1998), and most prominently abstracts and introductions of research articles in a single discipline (e.g., Swales and Najjar, 1987; Swales, 1990; Fredrickson and Swales, 1994), comparing variations in RA introductions and abstracts across disciplines (Swales and Najjar, 1987, Samraj, 2005; Hopkins,1988; Salager- Mayer, 1990; Holmes, 1997; Anthony, 1999; Williams, 1999; Connor, 2000; Upton and Connor, 2001; Samraj, 2002; Ozturk, 2007; Lores, 2004; Kanaksilapatham, 2005; Bruce, 2009;) and across languages (Taylor and Chen, 1991; Ahmad, 1997; Duszak, 1994; Martin, 2003; Fakhri, 2004; Yakhontava, 2006; Ansarin and Rashidi, 2009; Hirano, 2009, Loi, 2010; Loi and Sweetnam Evans, 2010; Soler-Monreal, Carbonell-Olivares and Gil-Salom, 2011).

2. Analytic Framework

Swales (1990) in his book entitled 'Genre analysis: English in academic settings' approaches the issue of text analysis from a genre-informed perspective where the fluidity and communicativeness of written texts influenced not only by different linguistic parameters but by different social, cultural, and disciplinary conventions. The most remarkable contribution in this text-analytic tradition is the notion of 'move' for research articles. Swales and Feak (2000) specify a move as "the defined and bounded communicative act that is designed to achieve one main communicative objective" (p. 35).

Based on the definition of move (see Figure 1), while a number of studies have also incorporated the traditional rhetorical categories of Introduction, Method, Results & Discussion, and Conclusion, hereafter IMRD/C, in order to come up with an exhaustive account of RA textual organization (see Martin and Martin, 2003; Samraj, 2005, for example). The moves contained in introduction units of the abstracts analysed were identified using Swales' (1990) CARS model. As it is indicated in Figure 1, the model consists of three moves with each having some sub-moves. An initial examination of the corpus confirmed that most of the moves postulated by Swales' (1980, 1990) models of RA introductions would be reflected in the Introduction unit of the abstracts analyzed in the present study. Thus, both Swales' (1990) CARS model of RA introductions and the four traditionally known moves (IMRD/C) were adopted in order to come up with an exhaustive account of generic patterns of English and Persian RA abstracts. Following Lorés (2004), we would call this approach a "combinatory type" (p. 298).

Move 1: Establishing a territory

        Step 1 Claiming centrality and/or
        Step 2 Making topic generalization(s) and/or
        Step 3 Reviewing items of previous research

Move 2: Establishing a niche

        Step 1A Counter-claiming or
        Step 1B Indicating a gap or
        Step 1C Question-raising or

Step 1D Continuing a tradition

Move 3: Occupying the niche

Step 1A Outlining purposes or
Step 1B Announcing present research
Step 2 Announcing principal findings
Step 3 Indicating RA structure
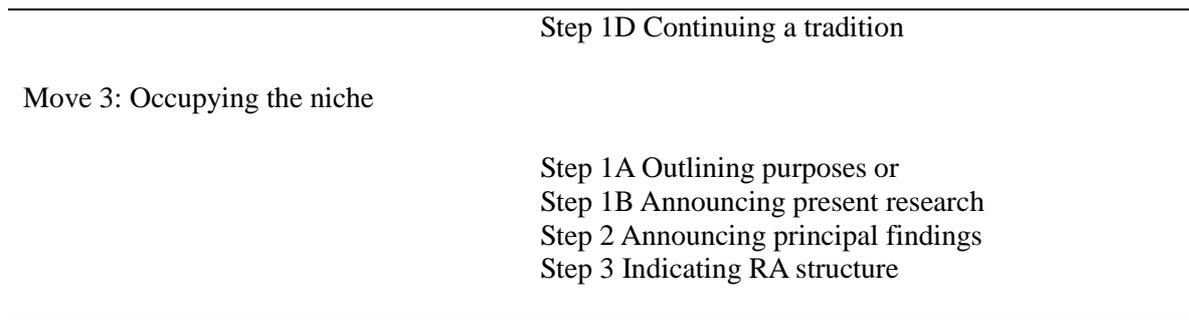
Figure 1. The structure of research article introductions (Swales, 1990).

3. Findings on Generic Moves in RAs

The combinatory framework has been used by many studies which have focused on generic variations across disciplines (see Samraj, 2005; Ozturk, 2007; Lores, 2004; Kanaksilapatham, 2005; Bruce, 2009 for instance). Samraj (2005) came up with a closer similarity in terms of function and organization between research article introductions and abstracts in Conservation Biology than was the case with Wild Life Behavior articles.

Another study by Kanaksilapatham (2005) reported that though article structures generally conformed to Swales' rhetorical model in terms of the presence of the moves and their sequence, the primary departure from Swales model lied in the patterns of cyclical configuration between moves.

Another type of variation which is the focus of the present study, can be comparative examination of the moves and traditional categories, contained in English articles within a single discipline written by native vs. non-native speakers of English. Taylor and Chen (1991) found systematic variation in the use of moves, which they attributed to intertwined connections between discourse structure and "culturo-linguistic systems" (p. 319). Ansarin and Rashidi (2009) could demonstrate that although both groups responded similarly to using such moves, they differed at micro-level analysis when the sub-moves were concerned. The findings suggested that macro-structures of the abstracts in the field of applied linguistics appeared to be bound by universal characteristics of discourse community (for whom the texts are written) rather than by the conventions of the authors' native language writing culture.

These contrastive studies have popularized the importance contrastive rhetoric research. Contrastive rhetoric research "examines differences and similarities in ESL and EFL writing across languages and cultures" (Connor, 2002, p. 493). That is why Atkinson (2004) calls for greater attention to the culture concept in contrastive rhetoric studies. According to Flowerdew (2002), contrastive rhetorical analysis of academics discourse shows that there are discrepancies in the way information is organized in different languages and cultures. In other words, it brings to light "vast complexities of the cultural, social, situational and contextual factors affecting a writing situation (Connor, 2008, p. 304). In fact, it has had a profound impact in understanding and popularising different cultural conventions in writing and these differences could be used as the basis for the development of pedagogic materials. The dominance of English as the language of science has spawned the use of Anglo-American rhetorical patterns in texts written by non-native academic writers. However, it is natural to expect some culture-specific peculiarities in the text production. Our purpose, therefore, is to identify the similarities and differences in the strategies adopted in both languages. In this study, the hypothetical influence of the conventions dictated by the authors' L1 in shaping the generic moves of the abstracts contained in English-medium applied linguistics RAs was investigated.

4. Corpora and Methods

Abstract sections of 80 randomly selected research articles (40 English articles written by native English writers and 40 English articles written by native Persian writers) in the field of applied linguistics comprised the corpus of the present study (see Appendix A). Care was taken to focus exclusively on data-based articles, i.e. those containing quantitative information rather than theory-

based ones (see Swales, 2004). In choosing the articles, effort was made to meet Nwogu's (1997) three criteria, namely, representivity, reputation, and accessibility. That is to say, the selected articles were fairly representative of the genre (research articles) in content (all the articles were also controlled for their topics to avoid any incongruity that might distort the result of the study) in the field of applied linguistics. Regarding reputation requirement, there is no reservation that all English journals have strong international stance and Persian journals are peer-reviewed and most cited journals in Iran. The ease with which the articles could be found comprised the accessibility criterion. All English articles written by native English writers were randomly selected from the five most leading international journals in the field (namely, Applied Linguistics, English for Specific Purposes, Journal of Second Language Writing, Journal English for Academic Purposes, TESOL Quarterly, and System) whereas English articles written by native Persian writers were mostly published in English-medium journals published in Iran. The publication period was from 2000 to 2010. All abstract sections were examined in terms of their length to make sure that they were of relatively the same length. Longer articles were included in very few cases where moves represented comparable patterns. The unit of analysis was the sentence though there were moves that were represented by multiple sentential units. In such cases, the whole group of the sentences were assigned to one move.

The motivation behind choosing applied linguistics was the conviction that higher and heavier use of rhetorical moves is witnessed in soft knowledge domains (Yakhontava, 2006). Since applied linguistics both focuses on the human-related issues and imply messages for humans on a social scale, it is considered a typical instance of soft knowledge within the locality of this study. In the latter fields, moves and strategies are mainly aimed at persuading readers of an argument.

To make corpus comparability possible, we calculated the percentages of moves in the two groups of articles. Then, the Independent Samples T-Test was employed as a statistical formula to see whether there were significant differences between the two groups of articles in the employment of moves on the part of the native English vs. native Persian writers writing in English.

5. Results and Discussion

In general terms, both groups of articles contained instances of all four basic structural components constituting a typical abstract. This sided with Salager-Meyer's (1990) postulation that a well-structured abstract should have all the four rhetorical moves which are mandatory in the process of scientific inquiry and patterns of thought. Though some similarities existed in the frequency and occurrences of these structural unites (moves) among the two groups of articles, significant differences were also present in the their employment and distribution in the articles analyzed. As indicated in Table 1, Results and Methods moves were the most frequent ones in each three groups of articles. That is to say, no matter to what language backgrounds or writing cultures the writers belonged, Results and Methods moves should have been present in the abstracts as they might be imposed by the requirements of the genre itself. The analysis did also not reveal significant differences in the frequency and distribution of these moves across two groups of articles (p-value > 0.05). These moves are to be called "normally required moves" as opposed to "optional" moves as classified by Nwogu (1997, p. 124).

Table 1. Frequency of occurrences and distribution of structural units in the abstracts

	English articles written by native English writers	English articles written by native Persian writers
Introduction	85 (70.83%)	54 (45%)
Methods	39 (97.5%)	40 (100%)
Results	40 (100%)	37 (92.5%)
Conclusion	18 (45%)	37 (92.5%)

One point that is worth mentioning about this convergence in the use and distribution of these moves specially the Method moves is the substantiation of Swales' (2004) differentiation of data-based and

theory-based articles.

With regard to Introduction units (Moves1, 2, and 3) which were the longest rhetorical units in all three groups of articles, significant differences were observed between native English writers and their native Persian counterparts, both writing in English and Persian (p-value < 0.05). That is to say, native English writers more dominantly drew on moves in the introductions of the abstracts compared with native Persian writers. This discrepancy in the configuration of introduction units of abstract sections is shown in Figure 1. It appears that rhetorical differences observed in the introduction units reflect some of the distinctive characteristics of the two different cultures, English and Persian.
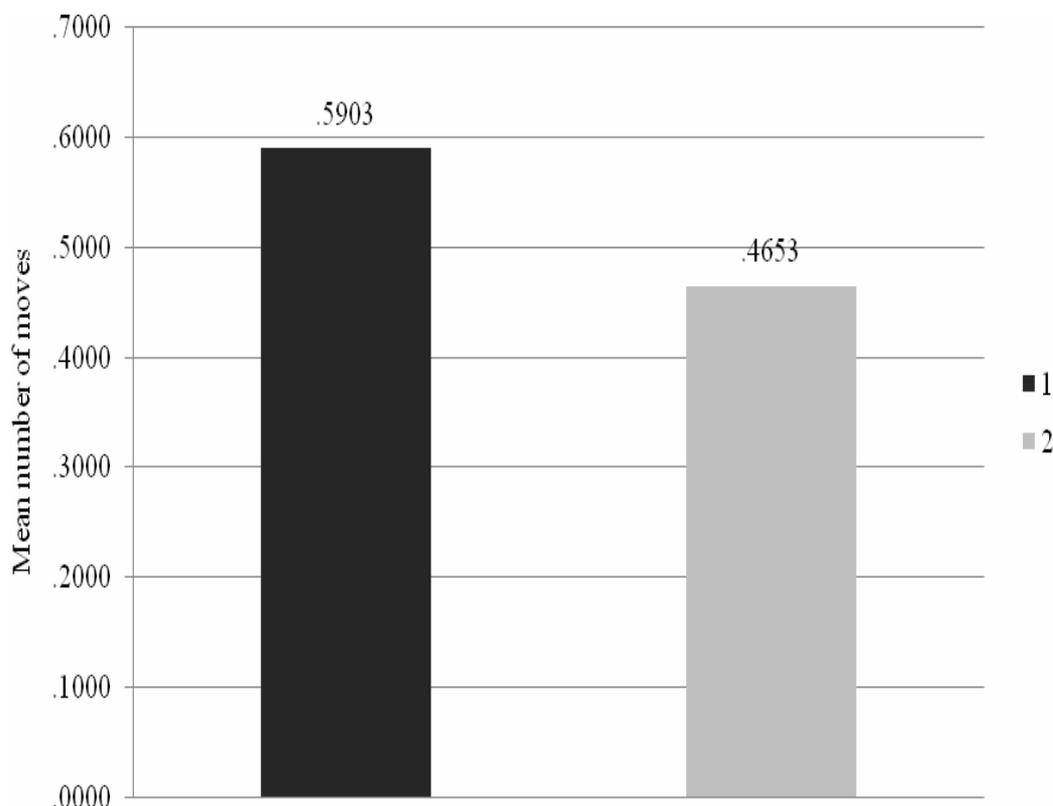

Figure 2: Use of three moves in the introduction unit of the abstracts in two groups of articles

Notes: (1): English articles written by Native English writers
(2): English articles written by native Persian writers
 Regarding Move 1 in which the authors are expected to establish the relevance of their work to the existing, no significant difference was found. Here are the examples of Move 1 in the corpus:
(1) In the past several decades, analyses of large corpora of published written texts in English have allowed for new insights into the meanings, uses, and functions of adverbials of all types. (Hinkel, 2002)
(2) The investigation of item differential functioning (DIF) is crucial in language proficiency tests in which test-takers with adverse backgrounds are involved, because DIF items pose a considerable threat to the validity of tests. (Birjandi and Amini, 2007)
The most noticeable difference between the two groups of articles lied in the pervasive absence of Move 2 which requires the writer to establish a niche by means of counter-claiming, indicating a gap, question raising, and continuing a tradition as revealed by the following examples:
(3) Despite his considerable influence on the development of ESP and all our professional lives, almost nothing has been written about John Swales' distinctive prose style   . (Hyland, 2008).
(4) In the area of foreign language reading research not enough is known of the extent to which foreign language readers can comprehend the texts in which textual signals are explicitly or implicitly marked, and in which the discourse mode varies from one type to another. (Alavi and Abdollahzadeh,

2008)

The analysis showed that native English writers drew on significantly far more instances of this move in their abstracts compared with native Persian writers (p-value < 0.05). This is in line with Taylor and Chen's (1991) study of the Anglo-American and Chinese RA introductions. One explanation might be that in such smaller discourse communities as those in Iran, authors might have less pressure for publication and therefore need not be competitive for a research space as discussed in Jogthong (2001). One might also argue that Persian writers conform to Swales' (2004, p. 244) OARO (open a research space) model in which "there is less competition for research space" (p, 244). Moreover, having solidarity with the local communities might discourage Persian writers to counter their colleagues' claims, identify gaps, and raise questions (hence a deliberate avoidance of Move 2).

With regard to Move 3, no significant differences between two groups of articles (p-value > 0.05) were observed. The greater use of Move 3 is mainly realized in both languages by the writers' intentions to state the main purpose of their studies shown below:

(5) This article re-examines the question of what makes some grammatical structures more difficult to learn than others, arguing that this question can only be properly understood and investigated with reference to the distinction between implicit and explicit knowledge of a second language.

                                        (Ellis, 2006)

(6) This paper, however, considers the application of the Systemic Functional (SF) theory of language to genre analysis.   (Babaii and Ansari, 2003)

Another point that is noteworthy is the coalescence of 'Purpose Move' with the Method Move which was observed 5 times in English articles written by native Persian applied linguists, and 12 times in English articles written by native English applied linguists. This might indicate space constraints required by the related journals as the following examples from the corpus show:

(7) This article discusses the effects of repetition (1, 3, 7, and 10 encounters)

on word knowledge in a carefully controlled study of 121 Japanese

students learning English.   (Webb, 2007)

(8) Thus, the present research will report on a grammaticality judgment test (GJT) investigating the clustering appearance of obligatory overt subjects and PRO in   infinitival clauses in 60 Persian learners of English divided into three proficiency

levels, each level consisting of ten early starters and ten late starters.

Finally, conclusion Moves were most dominantly employed by native Persian writers (p-value < 0.05) (see Figure 3). This might be linked to the way different writing cultures view ending their abstract sections. That is to say, conventions of Persian native language writing culture could have prompted writers to put an end to their article abstracts by summarizing the main points of their studies.
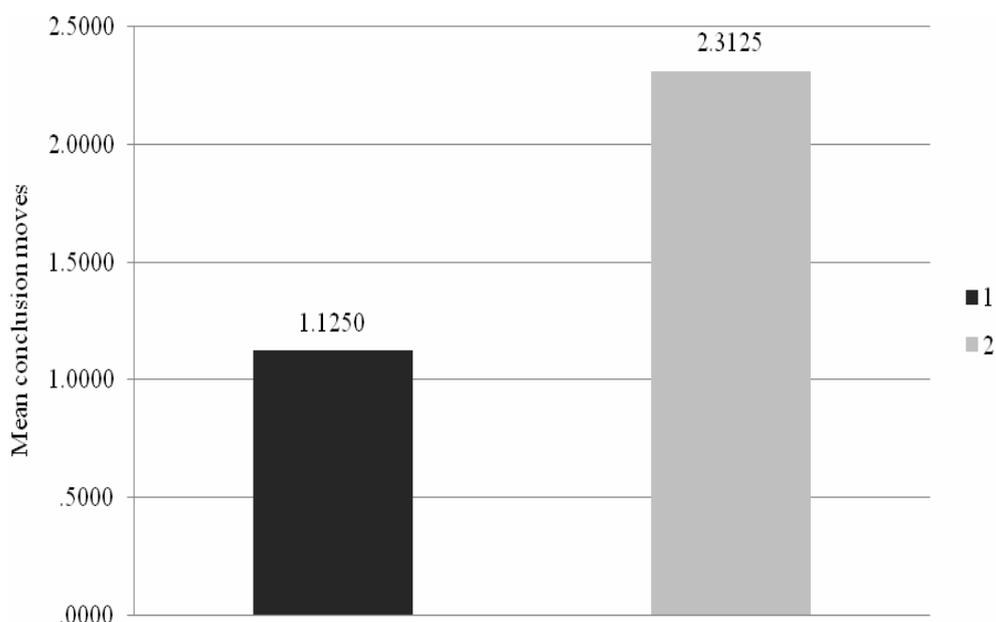
Figure 3: Use of conclusion moves in the abstracts in two groups of articles

Notes: (1): English articles written by Native English writers
(2): English articles written by native Persian writers

6. Conclusion

To sum up, apart from the most general similarities in the two types of articles, namely the very fact that they both employ all moves, two main differentness were observed. Though different rhetorical strategies were adopted in the configurations of introductions units by English and Persian writers, the most noticeable difference was observed in the persuasive lack of Move 2 in the English articles written by Persian writers. This could be linked to different ways that each writing culture views organizing the abstract sections of an article. Of course, Spack (1996) and Feng's (2008) argument is relevant here in that not all differences should be explained through the notion of culture since, as Yakhontava (2006) argues, there are very many interrelated variables even within the issue of culture that could be points of disparities in the way discourse is organized in different languages. Also, of greater importance is the consideration of the dynamic definition of the notion of the culture in any contrastive rhetoric study. Although contrastive rhetoric has often defined national cultures in the received mode, researchers in contrastive rhetoric have certainly not interpreted all differences in L2 writing as stemming from "the L1 or interference from the national culture. Instead, these researchers have explained such differences in written communication as often stemming from multiple sources, including L1, national culture, L1 educational background, disciplinary culture, genre characteristics, and mismatched expectations between readers and writers" (Connor, 2002, p. 504).

Though the relatively small size of our corpora leads us to view the results of the analysis with caution, our general findings brought to attention the importance of practical applications of results of a contrastive study to L2 writing students and writers. Indeed, as Leki (1991, p. 123) argues "it is in L2 writing classes that contrastive rhetoric work has the greatest potential practical application". Given the fact that contrastive rhetoric attempts to reveal differences as well as similarities in different writing traditions, cultural, linguistic and generic conventions could be used as the basis for the development of pedagogic materials.

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