

A GENRE ANALYSIS OF THESIS ABSTRACTS AT A STATE UNIVERSITY IN BANTEN

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to identify the move structure of English abstracts of students' thesis of a State University in public administration, management, fisheries management, and mathematics education programs, compare the consistency of these cross-disciplinary English abstracts with Bathia's four-move structure and Swales & Feak's five-move structure, and identify the preferred verb tense used of each move in the English abstracts of the students' thesis. This study employed qualitative case study. Forty (40) English abstracts (10 from each discipline) were collected and analyzed. This study reveals that A-M-R (Aim-Method-Result) move structure is the most frequent abstract move structure used in every discipline across the four disciplines with proportion 35%. Only 15% abstracts are in line with Swales & Feak's five-move structures, and only 4 (10%) abstracts are in line with Bhatia's four-move structure. The present tense and past tense are used in each move across the four disciplines.

Keywords: genre analysis, move structure, thesis abstract

INTRODUCTION

In the field of academic writing (English for Academic Purposes), students of graduate level who want to finish and graduate from their study in Indonesian context must write a thesis as one of the requirements. In writing a thesis, the abstract is considered as an important part that will bring readers to read the content (Emilia, 2009). The abstract is the first section to be read by examiners (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Readers or examiners of research articles or papers are busy people who have lots of works to do. For that reason, "most readers limit their initial research looking at titles and abstracts before choosing what Research Articles (RA) to purchase and read" (Alhuqbani, 2013).

According to Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995), there are four reasons that make abstract plays an important role in research articles. First, it provides important information or statements that are easy to be accessed. Second, it functions as the screening device that can help readers to decide whether they will finish reading the whole content. Third, it gives a framework for readers to read the article. Fourth, it provides summaries of primary points of a research article.

In general, according to Walter (2008), the word abstract means, "A shortened form of a speech, article, book, etc., giving only the most important facts or ideas."

In academic world as defined by Bhatia (1993), the word abstract means, "A description or factual summary of the much longer report, and is meant to give the reader an exact and concise knowledge of the full article." The generic purpose of research article abstract, according to Martín-Martín (2005), is "to provide the summary of the content of the accompanying article". Consequently, he suggests the writers of the research article (RA) abstract to present an abstract in a conventionalized form by using a series of rhetorical strategies or moves structures.

There are at least two popular generic structures to write up the RA abstract. Bhatia (1993) proposes the four-move generic structure of RA abstract, namely (1) introducing the purpose, (2) describing the method, (3) summarizing the result, and (4) presenting the conclusion. Hyland (2004a) proposes five-move generic structure of RA abstract. Those are introduction, purpose, method, product, and conclusion moves. In line with Hyland (2004a), Dos Santos (1996) and Swales & Feak (2004) propose five-move generic structure of RA abstract, namely (1) background, (2) aim, (3) method, (4) results, and (5) conclusion moves. Meanwhile, there are two tenses that are possible to be used in writing the RA abstract. Paltridge & Starfield (2007) state that (1) if an abstract is considered as a summary of a thesis, then present tense is used in it, (2) if an abstract is considered as a report of a research that has been done in the

past, then past tense is used in it.

The abstract is considered as a genre. The genre is defined as “a term for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations” (Hyland, 2004a). In addition, Martin (as cited in Eggins, 2004) states that genre is a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers or writers engage as members of our culture. Thus, recognizing genre of a text has the important role in identifying “...ways in which a particular text is similar to, reminiscent of, other texts circulating in the culture” (Eggins, 2004). Furthermore, Eggins (2004) explains that “if a text cannot easily be attributed to a genre, then it is in some ways a problematic text”. Accordingly, “A major focus of interest in genre-analysis has been the examination of the organizational patterns of English research articles (RsAs)” (Martín-Martín, 2005).

In the field of academic writing (English for Academic Purposes), conducting a genre analysis of research articles will shed light that, “it has conventions about layout, form, and style that are too large degree standardized” (Dudley-Evans as cited in Jordan, 1997). In this study, the focus of genre analysis is on the move structure of English thesis abstracts.

The word ‘move’ has been well-defined by several experts. Nwogu (1997) defines it as, “A text segment made up of a bundle of linguistics features (lexical meaning, propositional meanings, illocutionary forces, etc.) which give the segment a uniform orientation and signal the content of discourse in it.” Swales (2004) defines the word ‘move’ as “a discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse”. Thus, moves “manifest themselves as text units that occur in typical sequences” (Martín-Martín, 2005).

Consistent with Swales (2004), Ding (2007) defines the word ‘move’ as, “A functional unit in a text, being related to the overall task, which is used to identify the textual regularities in certain genres of writing.” One of the functions of the move is to shape the overall communicative purpose and the rhetorical structure of the genre (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Sadeghi & Samuel, 2013; Parodi, 2014; Kanoksilapatham, 2015). In line with the aim of this study, the word move is limited to the move of English thesis abstract context.

There have been many researchers conducted research in the field of genre/move analysis on RA abstracts. In 2011, Tseng analyzed move structure and verb tense of 90 research article abstracts in applied linguistics journals (TESOL Quarterly, Applied Linguistics, and Language Learning). The results of his study indicated that abstracts that were analyzed mostly used four-move structure. In 2013, Alhuqbani conducted a genre-based analysis of Arabic research article abstracts across four disciplines (law, linguistics, medicine, and police) in the Middle East. The result of his study showed that abstract in medicine field were in compliance with either Bhatia’s and Hyland’s model. Meanwhile, abstracts from the law, linguistics, and police field were not in compliance with both of the models. In (2014), Loan et al. analyzed the discrepancies between potential writers’ knowledge and the actual composition of 137 TESOL conference abstracts in Thailand. The results of their study indicated that there was a discrepancy between writers’ knowledge and the actual composition of conference abstracts. In (2015), Abarghooeinezhad & Simin analyzed the move structure of 50 abstracts in electronic engineering articles in Iran. The result of their study showed

that the move structure used by writers in Iranian and Native English journals did not correspond to Dos Santos’ (1996) model.

From previous studies mentioned, there is still a gap where no studies that have been conducted to analyze the generic structure of the Research Articles (RA) abstracts in management, public administration, fisheries management, and mathematics programs. However, those four programs also produce abstracts in their academic writing such as thesis or journal article. Therefore, by considering the gap, this study attempts to focus on analyzing the consistency of move structure of the English thesis abstracts in management, fisheries management, public administration, and mathematics programs with Bhatia’s (1993) four-move structure and Swales & Feak’s (2004) five-move structure; analyzing similarities and differences between the cross-disciplinary thesis abstracts in terms of the genre structures of moves; and analyzing the preferred verb tense of each move in the English thesis abstracts in the four disciplines.

It is expected that the results of this study can contribute to literature enrichment about move structure of English thesis abstract written by non-native English writers from across disciplines, especially in the Indonesian context. It is also expected that the results of this study can contribute to university principals of the study site in identifying their students’ academic writing skill especially in writing an English thesis abstract.

METHODS

This study employs qualitative case study since it analyzes genre or generic structure of thesis abstracts. It is in line with Hyland (2004b) who states that “information about genre practices is best approached using small-scale research and qualitative methods”.

Forty (40) English thesis abstracts from four disciplines (10 abstracts from the master of management, 10 abstracts from the master of fisheries management, 10 abstracts from the master of public administration, and 10 abstracts from the master of mathematics education) are collected using purposeful random sampling technique. Regarding the data collection technique employed in this study, the data are analyzed as follows. To analyze the move structure of the 40 English thesis abstracts, this study adopts the framework of Bhatia’s (1993) four-move pattern and Swales & Feak’s (2004) five-move pattern.

Following the previous research conducted by Kanoksilapatham (2005) and Alhuqbani (2013), for the purpose of this study, a move is considered compulsory if its proportion is no less than 60% of the corpus in each discipline. Consequently, if a move occurs less than 60% of the corpus, it is considered optional. Each abstract in the corpus is coded and analyzed by the writer using the criteria regarding the two frameworks.

Considering Emilia’s (2009) observation during her thesis supervision and examination activities to her master and doctorate students for years, there are many students who get confused to choose and to use tense in their abstracts. In writing up RA abstracts, Paltridge & Starfield (2007) point out that there are two ways the students can acknowledge the abstract. First, RA abstract is acknowledged as the summary of their thesis or second; it can be seen as the summary of their study that has been conducted in the past. Furthermore, they clearly explain and give examples that if the abstract is considered as the summary of their thesis, so

the abstract uses present tense (e.g., this thesis reports ...); if the abstract is considered as research activities that have been completed, so the abstract uses simple past tense (e.g., the study revealed that ...); and if the writers of RA abstract want to show the relation between the on-going (current) study with the previous study, present perfect tense can be used (e.g., previous studies have shown that ...).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As the answer to the first research question of this study, Table 1 shows the overall move structures of 40 English thesis abstracts from the four disciplines.

Table 1 The Move Structures of English Thesis Abstracts across the Four Disciplines

Number of Abstract	Public Administration	Management	Fisheries Management	Mathematics Education
1.	B-A-M-R-C	B-A-M-R-C	A-M-R	A-M-R-C
2.	B-A-M-R	A-M-R-C	A-M-R-C	A-M-R
3.	B-A-M-R	A-M-R	B-A-M-R	A-M-R
4.	A-M-R	A-M-R	B-A-M-R	A-M-R
5.	B-A-M-R-C	A-M-R	B-A-R	B-A-M-R-C
6.	A-B-M-R	B-A-R	A-M-R	B-A-M-R-C
7.	B-A-M-R	B-A-M-R	B-A-M-R	A-M-R-C
8.	A-M-R	B-A-M-R	B-A-M-R-C	A-M-R
9.	B-A-M-R	A-M-R	B-A-R	A-M-R
10.	B-A-M-R	B-A-M-R	B-M-A-M-R	A-M-R

*B = Background, A = Aim, M = Method, R = Results, C = Conclusion

Table 1 indirectly presents the most preferred abstract move structure in each discipline. In public administration program, the most preferred move structure is B-A-M-R with proportion 50% followed by A-M-R with proportion 20% and B-A-M-R-C with proportion 20%. In management program, A-M-R is the most frequent move structure being used with proportion 40%, followed by B-A-M-R move structure with proportion 40%, followed by B-A-M-R move structure with proportion 30%, A-M-R-C with proportion 10%, and B-A-M-R-C with proportion 10%. In fisheries management, the most preferred move structure is B-A-M-R with proportion 40%, followed by B-A-M-R move structure with proportion 30%, followed by A-M-R with proportion 20%, A-M-R-C with proportion 10%, and B-A-M-R-C with proportion 10%. In mathematics education program, the most preferred move structure is A-M-R with proportion 60%, followed by A-M-R-C with proportion 20%, and B-A-M-R-C with proportion 20%.

In relation to Table 1, Table 2 presents the total appearance of each move structure found from each discipline. A-M-R move structure is the most frequent move structure used in every discipline with proportion 40%, followed by B-A-M-R move structure with proportion 35%, followed by B-A-M-R with proportion 27,5%, B-A-M-R-C with proportion 15%, and A-M-R-C with proportion 10%. Besides, there is also other move structures appearance found in this study, i.e., B-A-R with proportion 7,7%, A-B-M-R with proportion 2,5%, and B-M-A-M-R with proportion 2,5%.

Table 2 The Preferred Move Structures from the Four Disciplines (40 Abstracts)

No	Move Structure	N	%
1.	B-A-M-R-C	6	15
2.	B-A-M-R	11	27,5
3.	A-M-R-C	4	10
4.	A-M-R	14	35
5.	A-B-M-R	1	2,5
6.	B-A-R	3	7,5
7.	B-M-A-M-R	1	2,5
Total	40	100	

Since abstract is a specific genre in academic writing, "it has conventions about layout, form, and style that are too large degree standardized" (Dudley-Evans as cited in Jordan, 1997). In the previous section, it is explained that there are at least two generic structures of the abstract; four-move structure and five-move structure. Bhatia (1993) proposes the four-move generic structure of RA abstract, namely (1) purpose, (2) method, (3) result, and (4) conclusion. Meanwhile, Hyland (2004a) proposes five-move generic structure of RA abstract, namely (1) introduction, (2) purpose, (3) method, (4) product, and (5) conclusion. In line with Hyland (2004a), Dos Santos (1996) and Swales & Feak (2004) propose five-move generic structure of RA abstract, namely (1) background, (2) aim, (3) method, (4) results, and (5) conclusion. Those two types of abstract move structures are called as conventional move structure (Alhuqbani, 2013).

With regard to the two styles of RA abstract move structures proposed by Bhatia (1993) and Swales & Feak (2004), the data of this study also shows that out of 40 abstracts, there are only 6 (15%) abstracts whose the move structures are in accordance with Swales & Feak's (2004) five-move structures, and there are only 4 (10%) abstracts whose the move structures follow Bhatia's (1993) four-move structure. It means that only 10 (25%) abstracts from total 40 English thesis abstracts that comply with the conventional move structures of RA abstract.

Meanwhile, there are 30 (75%) abstracts that are not in line with conventional move structure of RA abstract. From those 30 (75%) abstracts that are not in line with conventional move structure of RA abstract, it can also be identified that there are 26 (65%) abstracts that omitted one or two move(s) of the conventional move structure of RA abstract and 4 (10%) abstracts change the arrangement of each move of the proposed move structure, i.e., B-A-R, A-B-M-R, and B-M-A-M-R. Thus, this study also reveals that those three moves structures do not get along with Martín-Martín's (2005) argument about moves where he

states that moves “manifest themselves as text units that occur in typical sequences” and Ding (2007) who defines move as “a functional unit in a text, being related to overall task, which is used to identify the textual regularities in certain genres of writing”.

Following the previous research conducted by Kanoksilapatham (2005) and Alhuqbani (2013), for the purpose of this study, a move is considered obligatory if its proportion is no less than 60% of the corpus in each discipline. Consequently, if a move occurs less than 60% of the corpus, it is considered optional.

As the answer to the second research question of this study, Table 3 shows some findings to be presented and discussed. The Swales & Feak’s (2004) background move is compulsory in public administration with proportion 80% and fisheries management with proportion 70%, but the move is not compulsory in management with proportion 50% and mathematics education with proportion 20%. The aim move is compulsory in all the four disciplines: public administration with proportion 100%, management with proportion 100%, fisheries management with proportion 100%, and mathematics education with proportion 100%. The method move is compulsory in all the four disciplines; public administration with proportion 100%, management with proportion 90%, fisheries management with proportion 80%, and mathematics education with proportion 100%. The result of move is compulsory in all the four disciplines; public administration with proportion 100%, management 100%, fisheries management with proportion 100%, and mathematics education with proportion 100%. The

conclusion move is not compulsory in all the four disciplines; public administration with proportion 20%, management with proportion 20%, fisheries management with proportion 20%, and mathematics education with proportion 40%. It can be seen in Table 3.

Considering all the findings in this section, there is one move that is not used in most the abstracts from all the four disciplines, which is the conclusion move. It means that 30 (75%) out of 40 English thesis abstracts do not correspond with Bhatia’s (1993) four-move and Swales & Feak’s (2004) five-move structures. It is also not in compliance with Martín-Martín’s (2005) suggestion to the writers of RA abstract to present an abstract in a conventionalized form, by using a series of moves structures. But on the other hand, this finding also supports findings from former studies conducted by Hyland (2004a), Promsin (2006), and Alhuqbani (2013) in which the conclusion move is an optional one. It means that after analyzing abstracts that are taken as samples by those researchers, the results indicate that most of them are without the conclusion move. Therefore, it is called as the optional move.

In writing up an English abstract, there are two tenses that are possible to use by researchers. Paltridge & Starfield (2007) state that; (1) if an abstract is considered as a summary of a thesis, then present tense is used in it, (2) if an abstract is considered as a report of a research that has been done in the past, then past tense is used in it. Table 4 presents findings of how verb tenses are used in the English thesis abstracts across the four disciplines.

The data in Table 4 shows that present tense is more used with proportion 45% and past tense is used

Table 3 Distribution of Bhatia’s (1993) and Swales & Feak’s (2004) Move Structures across the Four Disciplines

Move	Public Administration		Management		Fisheries Management		Mathematics Education	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Background*	8	80	5	50	7	70	2	20
Aim	10	100	10	100	10	100	10	100
Method	10	100	9	90	8	80	10	100
Result	10	100	10	100	10	100	10	100
Conclusion	2	20	2	20	2	20	4	40

*Only for Swales & Feak’s (2004) move structure

Table 4 Verb Tense Occurrence in Each Move in English Thesis Abstract

Moves’ Tense		Public Administration		Management		Fisheries Management		Mathematics Education		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Background	Present	7	70	4	40	5	50	2	20	18	45
	Past	1	10	1	10	2	20	0	0	4	10
Aim	Present	5	50	6	60	7	70	6	60	24	60
	Past	5	50	4	40	3	30	4	30	16	40
Method	Present	3	30	3	30	4	40	6	60	16	40
	Past	7	70	6	60	4	40	4	40	21	52,5
Result	Present	3	30	4	40	3	30	4	40	14	35
	Past	7	70	6	60	7	70	6	60	26	65
Conclusion	Present	1	10	1	10	2	20	4	40	8	20
	Past	1	10	1	10	0	0	0	0	2	5

with proportion 10% in the background move across the four disciplines. From the eight abstracts of public administration program, seven of them use present tense and one of them uses past tense in the background move. From the five abstracts of the management program, four of them use present tense and one of them uses past tense in the background move. From the seven abstracts of fisheries management program, five of them use the present tense, and two of them use past tense in the background move. From the two abstracts of mathematics education program, none of them use past tense in the background move. In other words, results show that present tense is mostly used in the background, aim, and conclusion moves. Meanwhile, past tense is mostly used in methodology and results in moves.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the theories, findings, and analysis described in the previous section, the present study arrives at the conclusions, since the first research question focuses on finding out the move structures of the forty English thesis abstracts. It concludes that A-M-R move structure is the most frequent move structure used in every discipline with proportion 35%, followed by B-A-M-R with proportion 27,5%, B-A-M-R-C with proportion 15%, and A-M-R-C with proportion 10%. Besides, there are also other new move structures found in this study, i.e., B-A-R with proportion 7,7%, A-B-M-R with proportion 2,5%, and B-M-A-M-R with proportion 2,5%. The results of this study certainly add up a new finding to the available literature in the field of genre analysis, especially in Research Articles (RA) abstract genre. The second conclusion is that the distribution of Bhatia's (1993) and Swales & Feak (2004) move structures across the four disciplines. The analysis reveals that 30 (75%) out of 40 English thesis abstracts are not in line with Bhatia's (1993) and Swales & Feak (2004) five-move structures.

The third conclusion is the present tense is used with proportion 45%, and the past tense is used with proportion 10% in the background move across the four disciplines. The present tense is used with proportion 60%, and the past tense is used with proportion 40% in the aim move across the four disciplines. The present tense is used with proportion 40%, and past tense is used with proportion 52,5% in the method move across the four disciplines. The present tense is used with proportion 35%, and the past tense is used with proportion 65% in the result move across the four disciplines. And the present tense is used with proportion 20%, and past tense is used with proportion 5% in the conclusion move across the four disciplines. Considering the findings and discussions of this study, further research is recommended to be carried out to investigate the reasons why most of the students used the move structure they decided on.

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