Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

A GENRE ANALYSIS ON THE INTRODUCTORY SECTIONS OF
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ARTICLES WRITTEN BY NON-NATIVE
ENGLISH SPEAKERS PUBLISHING IN MALAYSIAN JOURNALS

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This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
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It is hereby confirmed that the student has done all necessary amendments of the project for acceptance:

_____

(Dr. Ting Su Hie)

Date: _____

Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled
"A genre analysis on the introductory sections of empirical research articles written by non-native English speakers publishing in Malaysian journals"
is to the best of the author's knowledge that of the author except
where due reference is made.

8th May 2009   _____
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ABSTRACT

A GENRE ANALYSIS ON THE INTRODUCTORY SECTIONS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ARTICLES WRITTEN BY NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS (NNES) PUBLISHING IN MALAYSIAN JOURNALS.

LIM SWEE HOON

This study aims to examine the textual organization and language features found in research articles (RA) Introduction section of empirical studies in Applied Linguistics (AL) written by NNES publishing in Malaysian journals. The objectives are to identify the extent to which NNES research article's introduction sections employ a similar structure to the Swales' (2004) revised Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model and the extent to which the language features (e.g. tenses, lexical signals) contained within key moves/obligatory steps of the Introduction section are similar to the language features proposed by Swales and Feak (2004). A total of 50 introductory sections of empirical AL RAs written by NNES in 7 Malaysian Online Journals were selected according to pre-determined criteria. Results of analysis showed that most of the NNES writers were aware and complied with the CARS model in terms of having all 3 obligatory moves in their introductory sections (35 out of 50). However, there was a marked divergence from the ordering of the moves where most did not follow M1-M2-M3 (CARS model) in a single path. Here, 34% applied the M1-M3-[other moves] flow while 52% showed skeletal signs of M1-M2-M3 interspersed with the reoccurrence of the moves. It was also noted that M1S3 (reviewing items of previous literature) exhibit the highest average occurrence per section and in terms of M2 (Establishing niche), M2S2 (Providing positive justification) was a more popular step than indicating gaps. For language features results, there was higher compliance to the checklist where the writers employed language items proposed. Furthermore, there was a prominent usage of modal auxiliaries especially in M1S3 to indicate tentativeness or make suggestions/proposals which was not described in the checklist. As a whole, the writers were seen to be able to convey the function of moves/steps effectively using language features proposed but the glitch lies in structuring the information in the introductory section.

ABSTRAK

GENRE ANALISIS BAHAGIAN PENGENALAN ARTIKEL KAJIAN EMPIRIKAL BAHASA INGGERIS HASIL PENULISAN PENUTUR BUKAN NATIF BAHASA INGGERIS (PBN) YANG DITERBITKAN DALAM JURNAL TEMPATAN (MALAYSIA)

LIM SWEE HOON

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti cara penulisan PBN dan ciri-ciri bahasa yang digunakan dalam bahagian pengenalan artikel kajian yang diterbitkan dalam jurnal Linguistik Terapan tempatan (Malaysia). Secara spesifik, objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menganalisa sejauh mana bahagian pengenalan artikel kajian yang ditulis oleh PBN mengikuti struktur Modal CARS oleh Swales (2004) dan mengkaji setakat mana ciri-ciri bahasa yang diaplikasikan dalam artikel kajian tersebut mengikuti ciri-ciri bahasa cadangan Swales dan Feak (2004). Sebanyak 50 bahagian pengenalan artikel kajian telah dipilih mengikuti criteria tertentu dari 7 jurnal tempatan yang didapati secare online. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakkan (35 daripada 50 artikel) PBN mematuhi Modal CARS dalam aspek bahagian pengenalan artikel mempunyai 3 langkah wajib/asas seperti yang dikemukakan oleh Swales (2004). Akan tetapi, terdapat kecapahan ketara dalam aspek penyusunan informasi dalam bahagian pengenalan kerana kebanyakkan artikel tidak mengikuti aliran M1-M2-M3 (Modal CARS). Sebanyak 34% artikel mengunakan struktur M1-M3-[Pengulangan langkah dalam CARS] manakala 52% artikel mengambarkan aliran menyerupai M1-M2-M3 tetapi disisipkan dengan pengulangan langkah lain antara struktur tersebut. Melalui kajian ini juga, telah dikenapasti bahawa langkah M1S3 (Rujukan literatur lepas) mempamerkan pengulangan purata tertinggi manakala untuk langkah M2 (Menyatakan nic kajian), M2S2 (pernyataan justifikasi positif menjalankan kajian) menjadi pilihan PBN jika dibandingkan dengan langkah M2S1A (menyatakan lompang kekosongan kajian lain). Bagi aspek pengunaan bahasa dalam bahagian pengenalan artikel yang dikaji, didapati PBN menunjukan pematuhan yang lebih tinggi terhadap ciri bahasa dalam langkah-langkah pengenalan yang diusulkan oleh Swales dan Feak (2004). Di samping itu, didapati katakerja auksiliari yang tidak didapati dalam senarai ciri bahasa pengenalan kerap digunakan oleh PBN terutamanya dalam langkah M1S3 untuk menyampaikan hasil kajian lepas yang tentatif atau merujuk kepada cadangan penyelidik lain. Secara keseluruhannya, didapati penulis PBN mematuhi ciri-ciri bahasa yang dicadangkan dalam bahagian pengenalan artikel untuk mencapai fungsi utama setiap langkah dalam Modal CARS, namun perbezaan ketara ialah pada bahagian penstrukturan informasi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AL	Applied Linguistics
CARS	Create A Research Space
CB	Conservation Biology
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
IMRD	Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion
JSLW	Journal of Second Language Writing.
MELTA	Malaysian English Language Teacher Association
NES	Native English Speakers
NNES	Non-Native English Speakers
P.P	Present perfect
PISF	Probable in some fields
RA	Research Article
SSLA	Studies in Second Language Acquisition
TESOL	Teaching of English to speakers of other languages
UKM	*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*
USM	*Universiti Sains Malaysia*
WB	Wildlife Behaviour

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter starts with a brief introduction on the background of the research problem from a more general context which is the nature of academic writing to specific genre-analysis research done in introduction sections. This leads to identifying the need for the present research to be conducted. The next section focuses on the aims and objectives of the present research in addressing the need for research. The significance of study is presented to justify why the research gap should be addressed and operational definition of terms used throughout the research will be explained. Lastly, a discussion on the scope of the study is presented to determine the extent to which the present study will or will not cover.

1.1 Background of research

Academic writing in recent years has become one of the popular genre attracting the interests and attention of numerous studies (Ozturk, 2007). As more opportunities for higher education are being opened to all, academic writing has become a much needed skill for graduate and undergraduates to master as it is a genre that they have to constantly produce throughout their years of studies as they work towards their degrees. Apart from students in tertiary settings, it is also a skill much needed by professionals from different discipline as well where they routinely write memos, letters or standard reports in their careers where all these are part of academic writing. For instance, a lab assistant should know how to write a lab report while in the architecture field, one should know how to write design reports. As a result of academic writing transcending towards all walks of

people from different cultures, race and even languages, there now exist an increasing demand for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in tertiary institutions especially in Asian countries where English is not the native language, to assist learners in systematically acquiring the academic English used in their disciplines. This is because, academic writing is complex in such a way that writers of the genre are expected to have an understanding of the target audience and to mould the purpose of their texts to fit the audience (Swales & Feak, 2004). In addition to that, they should also have a clear understanding and awareness on the style of organising information in a way that it would be valued by the discourse community in their own disciplines (Zimmerman & Rodrigues, 1990). Academic writing also requires one's writing style to reflect professional and scholarly work (objective and formal) with a smooth flow of ideas and minimum errors. Hence, these characteristics of academic writing require writers to possess not only the knowledge of their fields (own disciplines) but to be able to discuss and examine those issues critically and put forth the ideas through writing in a way that is "respected by others in the field" (Zimmerman & Rodrigues, 1990, p. 16).

However, the aforementioned requirements of academic writing poses a challenge to non-native English speakers (NNES) as the difficulties that they faced when asked to produce a piece of writing stems from inadequate knowledge on how texts are organised (Hyland, 1990). One particular area that demands rigorous academic writing apart from assignments in universities is when research is conducted and there is a need to report the findings to the scientific community. Research reporting is an important academic genre as research activities are constantly done to ensure the continuous advancement and expansion in knowledge and to improve living conditions. For the research to be taken seriously by the scientific community, it should then possess an impression of authority where the intertextuality aspect plays a part. By incorporating other researches into own study, it shows that the researcher possesses understanding of their own work and that the claims made were based on concrete evidences others have found, which is why the research purpose, procedures and findings should be

written in an explicit and detailed way that it provides opportunities for other interested researchers to replicate the studies (Gay, 1996, p. 537). Hence research is a never ending process where ideas or theories are constantly challenged and refined to better fit the every changing community.

One particular genre of research reporting that has been widely studied and analysed in terms of its structural organisation and linguistic features is the research article (RA). RAs have received much attention because in contrast with theses or dissertations, the length of the RA is considerably shorter and concise to include the major elements of research reporting, making it possible to disseminate and share the findings to the "largest possible audience" (Gay, 1996, p. 155). With the advent of technology, its smaller size made it more compact and easily downloadable from the internet; increasing its chances of being read by a larger audience.

Since Swales (1990) introduced his seminal work on the genre analysis model of introduction sections, it has led to the inception of various studies that even extends the model to other individual sections of the RA in various disciplines. This is because, the fact that RAs are now the "main channel of scientific and scholarly communication" (Holmes, 1997, p. 322) with a larger audience, there is a need to understand the stringent academic requirements for both the textual organisation and linguistic choices of that particular genre. It is then insufficient for beginning writers to possess a general idea of writing a RA as different discourse communities have distinct preferences towards the type of information deemed important to them and the style of writing and organisation that they find as the most effective way to achieve their purpose. As English has now been accepted as the "language of international scientific communication" (Martin, 2003, p. 26), this poses a dilemma especially to NNES who lack the cultural knowledge on the conventions valued by the international scientific community which mainly comprises of native English speakers (NES). This is where genre analysis on RAs plays a role to bridge the gap in scientific knowledge. Studies into the RAs of established writers could then act as a

guideline to NNES and even NES writers to adopt these discourse conventions that characterised international scientific writing.

Some of the studies over the years on the structural organisation of different sections in the RA include abstracts (e.g. Anderson & Maclean, 1997; Martin, 2003), introduction sections (e.g. Samraj, 2002, 2005; Ozturk, 2007), methodology sections (Lim, 2006), results sections (William, 1999; Yang & Allison, 2003) and discussions (Holmes, 1997). Moreover, several studies extend over to the whole genre of RAs across different disciplines (e.g. Nwogu, 1997 with medicine RAs; Posteguillo, 1999 with computer science RAs; Kanoksilapatham, 2005 with Biochemistry RAs; Yang & Allison, 2004 with Applied Linguistics RAs). These studies have helped to precisely and satisfactorily point out the characteristics of the textual organisation and linguistic features of the RA as opposed to instructional materials or EAP textbooks (e.g. Weissberg & Buker, 1990; Swales & Feak, 2004). This is not to say that the instructional textbooks or manuals for writing research are not accurate or reliable but these materials cannot be rigidly taken despite its claims of being interdisciplinary as subtle differences do exist in different disciplines and the manuals can only be used as a guideline to write RAs in general. Studies on RA genre analysis that were mentioned before could better reflect the style of the discourse communities conventions as it is based on the works of others and there is already concrete proof that others are writing in that way.

Despite the interest in other sections in the RA, introductions were the ones receiving widespread attention stemming from Swales' (1990) introduction of the pioneering CARS (Create-A-Research-Space) model where he stipulated that the introductions of RAs consists of three obligatory moves (establishing a territory, establishing a niche and occupying the niche) (Ozturk, 2007, p. 26). These moves are then realised or achieved through a set of obligatory or optional sub-move or steps. Introduction sections in various academic works like textbooks, thesis and dissertation, abstracts etc possess a similar communicative purpose which is to "introduce the academic work" (Bhatia, 1997, p. 183) and provide sufficient

background information to orient and prepare readers for the issues discussed in the topic. In other words, the general purpose is to introduce a written or spoken academic event. Likewise, introduction sections in RAs are an effort made by the researcher to "contextualise a research study being presented in the relevant literature, claim its novelty and present main features of the study" (Swales, 1990 as cited in Kanoksilapatham, 2005). Hence, this makes introductions in RAs one of the most important sections as it serves the role of orienting the readers and preparing them for the later parts in the RA (Weissberg & Buker, 1990). Besides, it also acts as an attention-catcher as introductions serve as a preview to what readers might find in subsequent sections. Hence, a poorly written introduction may discourage readers from continuing to read the RA no matter how ground-breaking the findings are. As mentioned earlier, in appealing to readership and obtaining the widest audience possible in the external scientific world, researchers have to operate in a highly competitive environment where they have to compete for research space before they can continue presenting their methods, findings and ultimately, discuss about them.

To date, there have been numerous studies focusing particularly in the introduction sections of RAs (e.g. Ozturk, 2007 and Samraj, 2002, 2005 for textual organisation, Gledhill, 2000, for the language features) while others touched briefly on the introduction sections when doing whole RA genre analysis (e.g. Nwogu, 1997; Kanoksilapatham, 2005). These studies range from a number of disciplines including the Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Engineering. Despite all these studies, a large body of data on genre-analysis were mostly devoted to the hard sciences discipline where standard practices and established methods are far more widely available than those from the social science and education (Swales & Feak 1994, as cited in Lim, 2006). As there is now an increasing number of NNES studying in the Social Sciences discipline through the use of English as the medium, more studies have to focus in this field to generate an extensive body of knowledge on the genre of social sciences RA especially those in the Applied Linguistics (AL). This is to provide a basic template for NNES students to structure their introduction section and to assist the writing

courses in tertiary institutions to tailor their EAP subjects to the current needs of students.

Genre-analysis studies characterising the conventional ways of writing introduction sections have been a major boon especially for NNES to write their introductions as similar as possible to that of the established writers. However, less attention has been given to analyse how NNES structure their introductions and the language features used by them to achieve its communicative purpose. Furthermore, existing studies tend to put more focus on NNES RAs introductions written in languages other than English like those done by Ahmad (1997) on Malay RAs and Taylor and Chen (1991) on Chinese RAs (as cited in Kanoksilapatham, 2005).

In the Malaysian context, English has the status of being a second language where it is widely used in many international transactions and correspondence (Baskaran, 2002). It is also used in local settings where there are many opportunities for one to use English. For example, the media and entertainment industry, medical dealings, hotel bookings, tourism industry and cultural exchanges are mostly done in English language. Hence, English is not foreign to Malaysians and they are already more or less familiar with its usage in their everyday lives. Despite the familiarity or close contact with the language, little is still known of NNES usage of English as a medium of communication in the academic setting especially in the production of RAs for publishing purposes. Ahmad's (1997) analysis on the introduction sections of Malay Language RAs is less able to portray accurately the rhetorical style of empirical applied linguistics RAs published by NNES in Malaysian journals especially those written in their second language, English.

By knowing NNES strategy of constructing their introduction sections written in English, it may provide insights to the lack of success of the RAs with the international community (Martin, 2003, p. 26) and to increase awareness among NNES in the Malaysian context, the differences between their RAs and

those internationally recognised. Besides, the findings of such studies may also help the international scientific community to gain better understanding that these discrepancies in NNES written work could be due to "cross cultural differences" in text structure and reader expectations (Martin, 2003, p. 26). For example, it is uncommon for non-Anglophone communities to establish a niche for their research by indicating gaps in previous researchers as it is not in their culture to criticise the works of others (Ahmad, 1997 and Taylor & Chen, 1991, as cited in Kanoksilapatham, 2005). This point out that it may not be due to their lack of expertise in writing RAs or deliberate ignorance that made them exclude this move. Thus, more research into the introduction genre that specifically addresses the writing of NNES scholars from Malaysian journals is needed to create a shared understanding between the international scientific community and the local academic community. This is so that the former may recognise the value of these discrepancies as part of the local's culture and not directly dismiss their research as inferior and that the latter may learn to adapt their research writing so that it share the characteristics of internationally accepted academic writing.

1.2   Aims and objectives of the study

This study aims to examine the textual organisation and language features found in the research articles (RA) introduction section of empirical studies in Applied Linguistics (AL) written by NNES publishing in Malaysian journals.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the extent to which NNES research article's introduction sections in Malaysian journals employ a similar structure to the Swales' (2004) revised CARS model for introduction sections in research articles.

2. Identify the extent to which the language features (e.g. tenses, lexical signals) contained within the key moves/obligatory steps of the introduction section that help to achieve the purpose of the moves are similar to the language features in the checklist adopted from Swales and Feak (2004).

1.3 Significance of the study

The findings for the present study should be able to contribute to the existing data available in the genre-analysis database of RAs particularly on the introduction sections. Holmes (1997) claimed that the bulk of genre-analysis research on RAs to date had been mainly focused on the areas of Engineering or Natural Sciences. This was also supported by Yang and Allison (2004) where AL is still a field that remain underexplored despite some recent studies. Furthermore, Swales and Feak (2004) pointed out that the standard practices and established methods for the field of Science, Engineering and Medical research are more widely available than in the field of Social Sciences, Education and Public Health. Hence, it is hoped that as the present research deals with analysing the introduction sections of RAs from the field of AL, the findings may provide further insights to the particular genre especially by examining the rhetorical options favoured by Malaysian writers in that field. This is important as it leads to the practical uses of the data especially for beginning writers from the Malaysian setting to be able to look at where their style of writing or RA textual organisation differs from that of the international scientific community and to adapt to those discrepancies in hope of appealing to a wider network of readers and to obtain international recognition.

Although there are already a number studies focusing on the RA introduction sections across or within disciplines (e.g. Samraj, 2002, 2005; Ozturk, 2007) few were done based on different language cultures. There are studies which focus on NNES RAs written in languages other than English (e.g. Peterlin, 2005 for Slovene RAs; Martin, 2003 for Spanish RAs; Ahmed, 1997 for Malay RAs) and this has provided valuable insights to how culture affects research article writings. However, studies that analyses how NNES construct their RAs in English as a medium of communication are still relatively under-explored (apart from Hyland, 2004). It is hoped that the findings of this research may show how Malaysian published RAs by NNES differ from Swales' (1990) CARS model and explore the applicability of the model across different culture but written in the same language which is English. How these NNES RAs'

structure deviate from a model that is internationally accepted and used as a template by many established research writers may lead to pedagogical concerns. This is where novice writers should be made aware of these cultural differences and thus prepares their RAs in a way that is accepted by the international scientific community.

The practical use of the findings from this research may be used to address the issue that as there is a large and increasing number of NNES undertaking Social Science subjects in English (Holmes, 1997), there is a need to provide a basic template for the structuring of introduction sections to enhance the ability of NNES to better understand and produce RAs. The importance of introduction sections in RAs will be discussed in detail in the next chapter but it is sufficient to know that this section determines the overall impression of how the RA will present the main features of the study and whether it would successfully attract one to continue reading or to disregard the importance of the research. The basic template of introduction section would be a valuable tool for NNES intending to write English RAs or novice writers who need assistance when writing for publications in hopes of obtaining recognition from the international scientific community through meeting their expectations and demands. This is supported by Martin (2003) that the present study could help future NNES RA writers especially those from the Malaysian context who wishes to obtain international recognition, identify and be aware of the common characteristics in their RAs which hinders them from being accepted and at the same time assist them to adopt discourse conventions that characterise internationally published RAs. Several studies have shown that there is no general rule that governs scientific discourse as socio-cultural factors may influence the preference of certain rhetorical strategies by the members of different scientific communities. This may seem like a discouraging situation to NNES as they are already facing difficulties with the acts of academic writing itself but it is hoped that writing courses in tertiary institutions may use the results of analysis in this study to tailor academic writing courses to meet the needs of NNES who encounter difficulties in writing introduction sections in their assignments or RAs.

1.4   Operational definitions of terms

1.4.1 Applied Linguistics

Applied Linguistics (AL) is a field that involves investigation and finding solution to language-related problems (Hudson, 1999). These problems identified by Hudson (1999) include language education (first, second and foreign language teaching and learning), translation and interpretation, lexicography, forensic linguistics and clinical linguistics. In other words, it comprises of basic research like discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and language acquisition which leads into specialised areas like pedagogy and other language-related research. One main distinguishing factor of AL is that it is interdisciplinary. As it focuses on solving "real-world" language problems, these problems often extends to a wide range of issues like psychology, pedagogy, social, political, economic as well as linguistic issues (Hudson, 1999). Hence, the corpus of RAs in this study will range from the aforementioned disciplines but one similar characteristic between them is that it deals with research set out to investigate problems in the world in which language is implicated.

1.4.2 Empirical research articles

Empirical research articles are academic works that appear in journals for the purpose of attaining the largest possible number of audience (Gay, 1996, p. 551) apart from theory papers, reviews and short communications. It is defined as a research done with actual experimentation and observation and uses the primary data (findings obtained from the research) to provide solutions or insights to the research problems (Saint Anselm College, 2008). This includes research that employ techniques like case studies, interviews, surveys, experiments and observation where data is derived not from a secondary source or through systematic logic but through the research itself.