

Corpus Analysis of Rhetorical Moves in Ma Dissertation Introductions in Applied Linguistics

L'Analyse des Mouvements rhétoriques dans les Introductions de Mémoires de Master en Linguistique Appliquée

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Abstract

The interface between genre analysis and academic writing has received much attention and recognition. This intersection has been mapped by different studies as they provide a macro rhetorical analysis that examines how the research space is created in an academic setting. Innovative models such as Swales' CARS model (1990; 2004) and Bitchener's model (2010) have been respectively designed to analyse the use of general introduction sections as an academic genre in scientific articles and dissertations because of their paramount significance. Regardless, master students in applied linguistics attempt to use a different conventional template as they write their general introduction. This study examines the relevant corpora of Ma dissertations produced during the academic year 2023-2024 at the English Department of Batna 2 University to evaluate the general introduction section from a rhetorical perspective. A macro-level analysis is employed to identify the use and frequency of rhetorical moves in a representative sample. An interview with three supervisors in applied linguistics is conducted to interpret the results and trace the reasons behind the students' choices.

Keywords:

Academic Writing – Genre Analysis – Ma Dissertation General Introduction Section – Rhetorical Moves.

Resumé

L'analyse de genre de mémoire a suscité l'attention des chercheurs qui sont passionnés par le genre académique. Plusieurs études offrent une analyse macro-rhétorique visant à examiner l'espace de recherche. Des modèles innovants, tels que le modèle CARS de Swales (1990 ; 2004) et le modèle de Bitchener (2010), ont été conçu pour analyser

l'utilisation de l'espace de l'introduction générale en tant que genre académique nécessaire pour les articles scientifiques autant que les dissertations et les mémoires ce qui affirme leur signification primordiale. Par contre, les étudiants de mastère, option linguistique appliquée tentent d'utiliser un modèle conventionnel différent lors de la rédaction de leur introduction générale. Dans ce contexte, il est nécessaire d'examiner le contenu dans l'introduction générale des mémoires qui sont produites durant l'année académique 2023-2024 au Département d'anglais- L'Université de Batna 2 afin d'évaluer la compatibilité entre l'échantillon représentatif et le modèle de Bitchener (2010). L'étude adopte une approche macro-générique qui détecte la fréquence et l'organisation des mouvements rhétoriques et un entretien avec trois directeurs de mémoires en linguistique appliquée est réalisé pour une interprétation des résultats.

Mots clés

Le genre de mémoire - analyse macro-rhétorique – l'espace de l'introduction générale – mouvement rhétorique

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1. Introduction

Recently, the term genre received noticeable attention from researchers and scholars in many fields, such as genre analysis, applied linguistics, and discourse analysis, due to its usefulness, particularly in English, for academic purposes. As clarified by Henry and Roseberry (2001), genre means a sequence of moves that fulfills a particular communicative purpose through a common structure. However, writing academic papers, especially by non-native English speakers in the context of higher education is highly demanding. Furthermore, composing a research space to meet the requirements of a Master degree is very challenging in terms of language accuracy, structure unity and methodology. In the context of applied linguistics, few contributions paid attention to whether Master students follow the same patterns, steps, or what Swales (1990) presented as "communicative moves" when relying on conventional templates. This study aims to explore how Master Two students use rhetorical moves in their dissertation's general introductions and analyse specific and common patterns employed by

students to introduce the conventional aspects in the general introduction section.

In this sense, the following research questions will be addressed:

- What rhetorical moves are performed in the general introductions of MA dissertations in applied linguistics at the English department of Batna 2 University?
- To what extent are the general introductions of MA dissertations in applied linguistics compatible with Bitchener's model of rhetorical moves?

2. Literature Review on Genre Analysis:

Originally, the term "genre" was used in ancient Greece to refer to three subdivisions of literature: prose, poetry, and drama. Furthermore, it accounted for the textual steadiness that formed the subject matter. However, in the field of ESP, the genre contains a class of communicative purposes that consequently constitute its rationale. These purposes are very important characteristics in addition to style, form and structure. The same idea was given by Swales (1990) when he presented the genre's five characteristics:

- Communicative events are the genre's core elements.
- Communicative events constitute the genre via a collection of communicative purposes.
- The genre types are diverse according to the specificity of each field.
- Yet, the guiding principles of the genre dictate its structure and content.
- The jargon used by the discourse community offers valuable

insights into understanding the evolution of the genre.

As far as genre analysis is concerned, Bhatia (1993) points out that it aims to explore how the situated linguistic structure is constituted in institutionalized academic or professional contexts. In that respect, it is necessary to follow specific steps and guidelines, as well as to outline the structure of academic papers. Dudley-Evans (1986) notes that genre analysis is a systematic examination that reflects a framework for categorizing a given genre. When writing an academic paper, researchers need to follow specific steps to produce a well-structured paper. Since the focus is on the general introduction of Ma dissertation, it is highly necessary to bear in mind that this section is important as a key research space for academic writers and scholars because it states the focus of the study and the way it should be implemented. Two models will be discussed below to provide the reader with a background of the CARS model and rhetorical moves analysis.

2.1 Swales CARS Model

Because research articles are common to academic writers and scholars, Swales (1990) examined the ways the research space is structured in the introduction section. His contribution typically follows a conventional generic structure that outlines the most important phases of research, moving from the what, the why and the how of the research. This led to the rise of what is known as the CARS model, creating a research space that guides scholars in introducing their research effectively as they prompt scholars to set their minds on specific ideas to be integrated communicatively into their academic papers. In that respect, he managed to analyse the research space of the introduction section using moves and steps in 1990 in a model, which was later refined in 2004. The moves and the

steps structures are described as follows:

Table 1 (Swales,1990, p. 141) :

Rhetorical Moves	Rhetorical Steps
Move 1: Establishing a territory	Step1: Claiming centrality Step2: Making topic generalization (s) Step3: Reviewing items of previous research
Move 2: Establishing a niche	1A: Counter claiming Step1B: Indicating a gap Step 1C: Question raising Step 1D: Continuing a tradition
Move3: Occupying a niche	Step 1A: Questioning purpose. Step 1B: Announcing present research Step 2: Announcing principal findings Step 3: Indicating RA structure

It is essential to trace the way the first rhetorical move is employed to describe the general outlines of the research topic, leading to what scholars have achieved previously and what gaps or questions remain unanswered. Automatically, this defines the focus of the research, whereas the third move presents the needed features that should be addressed to introduce the gap methodologically and explicitly. After the first model was created in 1990, many studies have extracted and evaluated the existence of difficulties in the application of the model, which urged Swales to revise it in 2004 by adding and removing certain steps. Among the changes that took place are the revision of steps in Move 1 and Move 3. This model has inspired many scholars to analyse abstracts and

doctoral thesis introduction and conclusion sections (Bunton, 2002; Samraj, 2002; Jing, 2013).

2.2 Bitchener's Master Model

Inspired by the CARS model in articles, Bitchener has proposed a rhetorical model to explore the introduction section of Ma thesis in linguistics. This model is employed to examine the general introductions of master theses of master students specialised in applied linguistics.

Table2 (Bitchener, 2010, pp. 35-36) :

Model of Master's Thesis Introduction Moves and Sub-move

Rhetorical Moves	Rhetorical Sub-moves
Establish a research territory	1.Explain the extent to which it is important, central, problematic or relevant 2.Provide background information 3.Introduce (and review) aspects of previous research in the area 4.Define terms and constructs
Establish a niche	1.Indicate a gap in previous research 2.Raise a question 3.Identify a problem or need 4.Extend previous knowledge

Occupy the niche	1.Outline purpose, aim and objectives of present research 2.Specify the research questions 3. Outline the theoretical perspectives 4.Describe the methodology and design of the research 5.Indicate the scope/delimitations of the research 6.Explain the contribution and value of the research to the field of knowledge 7.Outline the chapter organisation
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3. Research Methodology

3.1 Corpus and Sample Construction

The corpus of the study is made of six MA dissertation general introductions, which belong to the field of applied linguistics. They are taken from the English Department of Batna 2 University. It is very important to note that all the selected Ma dissertations were produced in the academic year 2023-2024. Moreover, they are selected randomly based on the following criteria: submission for a Master degree in applied linguistics for the academic year 2023-2024 and accessibility.

3.2 Instrumentation

To determine the move-steps organization in the selected general introductions and examine how they are designed in applied linguistics, it is very necessary to rely on both quantitative and qualitative methods. The former is used to determine the frequency and distribution of the sub-moves in the selected corpora. In contrast, the latter is employed for a generic analysis and to make sense

of the quantitative data. Moreover, Bitchener’s introduction model (2010) is relied on as an analytical tool to examine the rhetorical moves and sub-moves (steps) of each general introduction and to identify the whole move pattern that characterizes each sub-corpus.

4. Data Collection and Design

4.1 Corpus Codification

Six of thirty Ma dissertations are selected randomly by the Random Sampling Generator. In analysing the corpus, the general introduction of each Ma dissertation is codified in the form of a two-letter acronym and the number of occurrences. For instance, GI 1 codifies the general introduction of dissertation number 1. The rhetorical moves are identified by detecting the linguistic aspects that perform the communicative function and the purpose of each sub-move.

Table 3: The Codification of the Selected MA Dissertations

The General introducti on Thesis	Master dissertati on 01	Master dissertati on 02	Master dissertati on 03	Master dissertati on 04	Master dissertati on 05	Master dissertati on 06
The Codificati- on	GI1	GI2	GI3	GI4	GI5	GI6

4.2 Data Collection

For a valid collection of data, a combination of a "bottom-up" and a "top-down" approach will initially be relied on to pinpoint the used moves along with

the steps that construct them. They are grounded in the linguistic aspects related to each category, including the use of particular verbs, nouns, quantifiers, etc. Secondly, it is to transcend the linguistic restriction and this is through the interpretation of the lower textual units, which are not linguistically clear. So, the introduction sections will be deconstructed into rhetorical moves, which are identified via the basic rhetorical steps or sub-moves as explained by Bitchener's model.

5. Results and Discussion

The generic analysis results are presented in Tables 4, 5, and 6 where the frequency of each rhetorical move is identified through the linguistic features associated with each sub-move that occurs in the general introduction. The data is, then, processed qualitatively to identify common patterns in the occurrence of all the rhetorical moves using an interpretive approach and insights gained from the semi-structured interviews with three supervisors. This aims to achieve an in-depth understanding of the use of generic moves in master dissertations in applied linguistics.

5.1 Move One Analysis for General Introduction Section

Establishing a territory is an important rhetorical move in the general introductions' dissertations in applied linguistics. The mean of this move is 62.49, which means it is conventional. Students tend to rely on claiming centrality and provide background information in the section, which is entitled "Background of the study". In this way, these sub-moves are regarded as obligatory to explore research topics such as *The effectiveness of AI-powered lesson plans in promoting higher-order thinking skills* and *Impact of Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer on Promoting the Students' Writing Skill*. The novelty of the topics

demands more background information at the expense of indicating the previous research and definitions. Students, however, provide operational definitions for the variables studied in move 3 as will be explained.

Table 4: The Distribution Table of Move One

Moves and Steps General Introductions	GI1	GI2	GI3	GI4	GI5	GI6	Frequency	Percentage
M1: Establish a Territory								
S1: Claiming centrality	P	P	P	P	/	P	5	% 83.33
And/or								
S2: Provide background information/or	P	P	/	P	P	P	5	%83.33
S3 Reviewing items of previous research	P	P	/	/	P	P	4	%66.66
S4 Define terms or constructs	/	/	/	/	/	P	1	%16.66

5.2 Move Two Analysis for General Introduction Section

Defining a niche essentially delineates the research purpose by guiding the study’s objectives in the following move. The findings demonstrated in Table 5 indicate that there is a 100% occurrence of this move in the problem statement section through a wide range of sub-moves fitted the specific requirements and characteristics of the research topic. For instance, GI1 and GI6 attempt to identify a gap in the existing knowledge regarding the use of AI tools in promoting critical

thinking at a primary level in GI1 and the exploration of learner autonomy from the perspective of the teachers' attitudes and practices in GI6.

Table 5: The Distribution Table of Move Two

Moves and Steps General Introductions	GI1	GI2	GI3	GI4	GI5	GI6	Frequency	Percentage
M2: Establish a Niche								
S1 Indicating a gap	P	/	/	/	/	P	2	%33.33
S2 Question-raising	/	/	p	/	/	/	1	%16.66
S3 Identifying a problem or need	/	P	/	/	P	/	2	%33.33
S4 Extending previous Knowledge	/	/	P	P	/	/	2	%33.33

Other than that, few students focused on raising questions or extending previous knowledge within broader academic discourse. For instance, GI3 raises a question regarding the extent to which communication strategies help to fill in the vocabulary gaps and misunderstandings in the context of second-year students at the Department of English. GI4 also aims at extending the knowledge produced about the effectiveness of Chat Generative Pretrained Transformer (CGPT) in language learning and improving writing skills. This highlights a collaborative approach in knowledge building.

The nature of the field urges students to identify specific problems or needs in the context of language learning.GI2 examines the anxiety surrounding

first-year EFL students regarding teachers' feedback on oral expression, whereas GI5 addresses the issue of textbooks, which often emphasize knowledge retention at the expense of high-order thinking skills. This means that master students align their research with real-world issues, which is crucial and significant in applied fields.

5.3 Move Three Analysis for General Introduction Section

Occupying the niche is the last move where students demonstrate the way they conduct their research. As shown in Table 06 below, each general introduction section studied in this context meets the move criteria. The following sub-moves: one, two and five are covered in all the dissertations. This indicates that they are necessary for a solid understanding of the fundamental components that effectively underpin research. With less importance yet still belonging to the obligatory scale, sub-moves four, five and seven are deemed important because methodology, design, contribution and chapter organization are crucial steps to describe the research focus purposively and effectively.

On the other hand, sub-move three is considered to a minimum extent conventional with a frequency of 33.33%. This suggests that most students emphasize methodological features and the design of research rather than the theoretical framework, likely due to the nature of their inquiry, which is practical in the first place. Thus, the findings revealed that students are proficient in utilizing sub-moves connected to the study's objectives, aims, research questions, methodology, structure and significance. On the other hand, they tend to place less emphasis on the theoretical framework, which necessitates improvement. In this respect, encouraging students to locate their research problem via a well-defined

theoretical framework may improve the quality of dissertations and enhance depth and contextualization within the field of applied linguistics.

Table 6: The Distribution Table of Move Three

Moves and Steps General Introductions	GI1	GI2	GI3	GI4	GI5	GI6	Frequency	Percentage
M3: Occupy the Niche								
S1 Outline purpose, aim and objectives of present research	P	P	P	P	P	P	6	%100
S2 Specify research questions or hypotheses (optional)	P	P	P	P	P	P	6	%100
S3 Outline the theoretical perspectives/positions	P	P	/	/	/	/	2	%33.33
S4 The methodology and design of the research	/	P	P	P	P	P	5	%83.33
S5 Scope/delimitations of the research	P	P	P	P	P	P	6	% 100
S6 Stating the contribution or the value of the research	P	P	/	P	P	P	5	% 83.33
S7 Outlining the chapter organisation of the thesis	P	/	P	P	P	P	5	%83.33

5.4 Rhetorical Moves Pattern

The rhetorical moves organization analysis identifies the pattern used by students to evaluate the conventional generic aspects in the general introduction section. By analysing the rhetorical moves structure, insights can be gained into students' awareness and adherence to the standards of rhetorical moves in the general introduction section. The findings are presented in Table 07.

Table 7: The Moves Organization

Gls	Move structure
GI1	M1 (S1, S2, S3) =) M2 (S1) =) M3 (S1, S2, S6, S5, S3, S7)
GI2	M1 (S1, S2, S3) =) M2 (S3) =) M3 (S1, S2, S6, S1, S4, S3, S5)
GI3	M1 (S1) =) M3 (S1) =) M2 (S2, S4) =) M3 (S1, S2, S7, S4, S5)
GI4	M1 (S1, S2) =) M2 (S4) =) M3 (S1, S2, S6, S1, S4, S5, S7)
GI5	M1 (S2, S3) =) M3 (S1) =) M1 (S3) =) M2 (S3) =) M3 (S1, S2, S4, S5, S6, S7).
GI6	M1 (S1, S4, S2, S3) =) M2 (S1) =) M3 (S1, S2, S4, S6, S5, S7)

The findings on the move organisation show that the general introduction sections under study use both models of linearity and non-linearity. Some general introduction sections show a clear linear pattern through moves. For example, GI1, GI2, GI4, and GI6 exhibit a linear structure, where the first move leads directly to move two, using a variation in sub-moves. This demonstrates a clear and coherent structure that adheres to the generic standards.

On the other hand, GI3 and GI5 demonstrate a complex, non-linear organization of rhetorical moves, which indicates a lack of generic awareness when writing the general introduction section. For instance, in GI3, aspects of move one intersect with elements of move three, which creates a confusing form that negatively influences the communicative effect of the general introduction. Also, the research aim (move3, sub-move 1) is repeated twice, which creates a redundancy that diminishes the significance of the second move. In a similar vein,

G15 highlights how the logical connection between the first and second moves is interrupted by the presence of the third move, in line with the research aim (move 3, sub-move 1).

The majority of students adhere to a general introduction template that includes the common aspects mentioned above in Move Three Analysis. It is important to note that these elements are not aligned with the steps of the three rhetorical moves and are used differently in terms of order and relevance. The three moves occur in different aspects, such as in G11. The first and second moves are keenly expressed in the study's background and replicated in the problem statement, whereas the second move is not well articulated. The redundancy and non-linear presentation of the three rhetorical moves in the features elaborated in the general introduction indicate that students are almost not fully aware of the generic competence and the template followed by students fails to guide them in capturing the communicative essence of the general introduction. One of the technical mistakes that underpins this analytical perspective in G16 is the students' confusion between the significance of the study (Move three: Step six) and the gap in previous knowledge (The second move, Step one). This confusion undermines the communicative structure and purpose regarding the study's significance.

6. Conclusion

The generic moves that are performed in Ma dissertation general sections in the option of applied linguistics for the academic year 2023-2024 are the first, the second and the third moves that are common in the CARS model. Most Ma Students rely on claiming centrality and provide background information in the section which is entitled "Background of the study". The aforementioned sub-moves are considered essential for exploring the research topics. For the second move, it is shown that 100% of occurrences are located in the section of the

problem statement through a large variety of sub-moves according to the needs and nature of the research topic. As far as the third move is concerned, all general introductions sections fulfill the criteria. Steps one, two and five are deemed most important, which indicates that they are obligatory for a solid understanding of the foundational elements that frame research effectively in applied linguistics.

The findings also indicated that the rhetorical moves pattern in the general introductions ranges between linearity and non-linearity with the slightly fragmented occurrence of sub-moves of each communicative move in different conventional elements. In that respect, Ma dissertation's general introductions are compatible with the rhetorical moves of Bitchener's model to the extent of 66.66%. Improvements are still necessary in terms of raising students' awareness about the generic competence and the function of each sub-move within the main communicative moves. Thus, this study recommends integrating the teaching of generic analysis into the methodology syllabus for the master's degree.

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