Rhetorical Perspectives of Undergraduate Students' Theses Abstracts

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ENGLISH ABSTRACT

The present article aims at describing the students' theses abstracts viewed from the rhetorical perspectives. It examines whether the abstracts provided in the university website include the essential rhetorical moves and whether the moves are presented in the sequence according to Hyland's five-move classification (Introduction, Purpose, Method, Product, and Conclusion) of rhetorical moves. Eighty abstracts of the research articles written by the students were collected using purposive sampling. The frequency of occurrence of each move was statistically calculated and tallied. Two ESL (English as a second language) researchers validated the data classification. The findings revealed that 53.75% of the abstracts were found out to be written in accordance with the structure. Most abstracts give information on the purpose, methodology, and findings of the associated article. About half of the articles omit introduction of the topic and discussion of the findings. Moves "product" and "conclusion" were missing in a few abstracts. The students' lengthy "introduction" move and over brief "product" move were found in most abstracts. Some rhetorical moves appeared to have higher incidence of occurrences than the others. The findings lend further insights into the needs of professional development among academics, particularly in academic research report writing.

Key words: rhetorical moves, student's article abstracts

INDONESIAN ABSTRACT

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan abstrak skripsi mahasiswa dilihat dari sudut pandang retorik- meneliti apakah abstrak-abstrak tersebut memiliki 'rhetorical moves' yang esensial dan apakah

'rhetorical moves' dipresentasikan dalam urutan sesuai dengan klasifikasi lima langkah Hyland (Pendahuluan, Tujuan, Metode, Produk, dan Kesimpulan) gerakan retoris. Delapan puluh abstrak artikel penelitian yang ditulis oleh siswa dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan purposive sampling. Frekuensi terjadinya setiap 'move' dihitung. Dua peneliti ESL (bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa kedua) memvalidasi klasifikasi data. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa 53,75% abstrak ditemukan ditulis sesuai dengan strukturnya. Sebagian besar abstrak memberikan informasi tentang tujuan, metodologi, dan temuan dari artikel yang terkait. Sekitar setengah dari artikel menghilangkan pengenalan topik dan diskusi tentang temuan. Tidak terdapat Move "produk" dan "kesimpulan" dalam beberapa abstrak. Ditemukan pula move "pengantar" yang panjang dan "produk" yang singkat pada kebanyakan abstrak. Beberapa move tampaknya ditemukan lebih banyak daripada yang lain. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan lebih lanjut mengenai kebutuhan pengembangan profesional di kalangan akademisi, terutama dalam penulisan laporan penelitian akademis.

Kata kunci: *'Rhetorical Moves', Abstrak Artikel mahasiswa*

INTRODUCTION

An abstract is the most important part of a research article because it represents the summary of the entire article. An abstract is the first part of an academic article that readers will read in order to determine the relevancy of the article to the readers (Hongwei & Yuying 2011). Hence, it acts as readers' screening device (Huckin, 2006). Therefore, the quality of an abstract and its persuasiveness is essential in attracting readers' interest to read the entire article. It is therefore crucial for writers to ensure that they use effective rhetorical choices in their abstract and follow appropriate sequence of the rhetorical moves when developing their abstracts in order to increase the rate of their article being read in its entirety. In addition, it still reflects the writer's academic credibility (Sidek, et.al, 2016).

Previous studies (Gessesse, 2016**;** Khansari, et.al., 2016**;** Nikpei, 2016**;** Chalak & Norouzi, 2013; Sabouri & Hashemi; Ren & Li, 2011) have shown the indispensable importance of abstracts in the contemporary flow. It has received considerable attention in academic written genre among the international community. Many researchers have recently turned to the relevant research in relation to genre analysis, thematic organization, formulaic language, rhetorical structure, etc. Research in terms of rhetorical structures such as moves and steps is

also regarded as one of the recommendations for further research expansion (Tu & Wang, 2013).

There have been extensive studies on abstract in published articles and graduate theses (ibid.). The studies on undergraduate students' abstracts in their research articles and theses seem to be rather scarce. Taking into account the importance of quality of academic writing and the scarcity of studies on abstracts for undergraduate students, the current study attempted to analyze undergraduate students' abstract writings in their undergraduate theses as to the extent to which they meet the standard abstract rhetorical moves.

The purpose of the current study was to examine whether the students' abstracts provided in their undergraduate thesis include the essential rhetorical moves and whether the moves are presented in the sequence according to the selected classification. Therefore, the study pursued the following research following:

Research Question 1: Do the abstracts in the undergraduate students' research articles include the required rhetorical moves?

Research Question 2: Do the abstracts in the undergraduate students' research articles follow the rhetorical moves sequence?

METHODS

The current study examined abstracts in the selected undergraduate students' theses written in English and of their relevant academic discipline or topics. In selecting the samples for the study, the first section of the thesis, which comprises the abstract written in English and Indonesian, was first screened according to the language of each abstract. In the initial screening phase, all abstracts in Indonesian were excluded. The second phase was to identify the rhetorical moves of the abstracts for empirical studies. Therefore, all abstracts for theoretical and conceptual papers were excluded. The screening yielded 80 abstracts for studies, which are empirical in nature. The reason of selecting only abstracts for empirical studies was due to the use and the sequence of rhetorical moves, as suggested by Hyland (2000), in abstracts for empirical studies papers are more explicit and relevant than abstracts

in theoretical or conceptual papers (Chalak & Norouzi, 2013).The abstracts from thesis were examined according to Hyland's (2000) five-move classification *(Introduction, Purpose, Method, Product, and Conclusion)* of rhetorical moves as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Hyland's five-move model of abstract analysis

Introduction	Establishes context of the paper and motivates the research
Purpose	Indicates purpose, thesis or hypothesis, outlines the intention behind the paper
Methods	Provides information on design, procedures, assumptions, approach, data, etc.
Product	States main findings or results, the argument, or what was accomplished.
Conclusion	Interprets or extends results beyond the scope of the paper, draws inferences, points to applications, or wider applications

(Hyland, 2000, p. 67)

The data analysis is twofold following the procedure by Wu and Tang (2013). The former was the quantitative analysis focusing on the investigation of verb tense, especially set out for the types of moves. The latter was the qualitative analysis to assess the rhetorical structure in accordance with Hyland's (2000) five-move classification. The moves were applied in reviewing the moves structure of the selected abstracts in acquiring the data for the study. To insure the consistency of the analysis, a subset of abstracts was given to the selected coder, an expert in discourse analysis, to independently conduct the individual move identification (Saeeaw & Tangkiengsirisin, 2014). The validity index was 0.98 as shown in Table 2. The validity index is an "index of inter-rater agreement that simply expresses the proportion of agreement, and agreement can be inflated by chance factors." (Polit & Beck, 2006: 491). The value means that the classification was judged to be quite or highly relevant since Lynn (1986) recommended that the index should not be lower than .78 to be rated as quite or highly relevant.

Table 2 Summarized results of inter-coder reliability analysis in percentage

Moves	Coded units	Agreement	Disagreement	Percentage
Introduction	51	51	0	100
Purpose	58	58	0	100
Methods	49	48	1	97.95
Product	62	60	2	96.77

Conclusion	52	50	2	96.15
Total	272	267	5	**98.16**

In order to answer Research Question 1, the selected abstract were analyzed by tabulating the moves structure of each abstract according to the revised Hyland's (2000) moves category. To answer Research Question 2, the data were analyzed by marking the presence and absence of each rhetorical move as in the revised Hyland's (2000) moves classification. Therefore, the coding used to analyze sequence was Introduction move (either the presence of Problem move or Theory move or both moves), Purpose move, Method move, Product move and Conclusion move. Hence, an abstract that has at least either component of the Introduction move (Problem move or Theory move) was considered to have suffced the Introduction move. All missing moves in each abstract were recorded to determine if the abstract's moves structure in sequence or not. Abstracts that contain all the moves were categorized as abstracts with rhetorical moves sequential structure. On the other hand, abstracts that have missing moves were categorized as abstracts without rhetorical moves sequential structure.

DISCUSSION

Rhetorical Moves Classification

The research findings are presented in two parts: (1) certain variations of the move frequency, and (2) the move sequencing. The rhetorical moves frequency section presents the findings for Research Question 1 while rhetorical moves sequence presents the findings for Research Question 2.

Table 2 shows the rhetorical move analysis for the Introduction move, consisting of the Problem move and the Theory move. Out of 80 abstracts, about 51 % presented the research problem as the Introduction moves in their abstracts while approximately 35 % use theory as their Introduction move. Only 18 % of the selected abstracts incorporate both Problem and Theory moves as part of their Introduction move.

Table 2 Introduction Rhetorical Move Analysis

Moves	Introduction Move					
	Problem		Theory		Problem & Theory	
Total Abstracts (f)	41		28		11	
Inclusion	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Percentage (%)	51	49	35	65	18	82

Table 3 presents the rhetorical move analysis for the Purpose move. Approximately 73 % of the selected abstracts contain the Purpose move and about 27 % excluded the Purpose move.

Table 3 Purpose Rhetorical Move Analysis

Moves	Purpose Move	
Total Abstracts (f)	Yes	No
Inclusion	58	22
Percentage (%)	73	27

Table 4 demonstrates the method rhetorical move analysis. It reveals that approximately 61 % of the selected abstracts comprise the Method move and only about 39% of the selected abstracts did not include the Method move.

Table 4 Method Rhetorical Move Analysis

Moves	Method Move	
Total Abstracts (f)	Yes	No

Inclusion	49	31
Percentage (%)	61	39

Table 5 provides the statistics of the Product rhetorical move analysis. The majority of the selected abstracts (78%) included the Product move. Only 18 abstracts (22%) did not include the Product move.

Table 5 Product Rhetorical Move Analysis

Moves	Product Move	
Total Abstracts (f)	Yes	No
Inclusion	62	18
Percentage (%)	78	22

Table 6 depicts the findings of the Conclusion rhetorical move analysis. Approximately, 78 percent of the abstracts included the Conclusion move while about 22 percent of the abstract were without the Conclusion move.

Table 6 Conclusion Rhetorical Move Analysis

Moves	Product Move	
Total Abstracts (f)	Yes	No
Inclusion	52	28
Percentage (%)	65	35

Rhetorical Moves Sequential Structure

This section presents the findings for Research Question 2. The findings are in the forms of overall analysis of rhetorical moves sequential structure and the types of missing moves structure.

Table 7 shows that that the majority of the selected abstracts (54%) did not follow the rhetorical moves sequential structure. Only 37 abstracts (46%) followed the sequence.

Table 7 Overall Analysis of Abstract Rhetorical Moves Sequential Structure

Abstract With Sequential Structure	Abstract Without Sequential Structure
37(*f*)	43(*f*)
46%	54%

N=80

Table 8: Analysis of Types of Missing Moves Structure

Missing Moves Structures	Frequency	Percentage (%)
(Int)-Pur-Met-Pro-Con	18	22.5
Int-(Pur)-Met-Pro-Con	12	15
Int-Pur-(Met)-Pro-Con	8	1
Int-Pur-Met-Pro-(Con)	9	11.25
(Int)-Pur-(Met)-(Pro)-Con	12	15
(Int)-Pur-Met-Pro-(Con)	11	13.75
Int-Pur-(Met)-Pro-(Con)	5	0.625
Int-(Pur)-Met-Pro-(Con)	4	0.5

N=80

Key: (Int)= Missing Introduction move; (Pur)= Missing Purpose move; (Met)= Missing Method move; (Pro)= Missing Product move; (Con)= Missing Conclusion move

Table 8 exhibits that there were 8 types of missing moves structure which the authors of the selected abstracts committed. The most prominent was the *(Int)-Pur-Met-Pro-Con* type (22.5%) followed by the *Int-Pur-(Met)-Pro-Con* and (Int)-Pur-(Met)-(Pro)-Con types. Both carried 15% in weight. They were then followed by *(Int)-Pur-Met-Pro-(Con) type (13.75%), Int-Pur-Met-Pro-(Con) type (11.25)* and *Int-Pur-(Met)-Pro-(Con)* type (1%). The other types, *Int-Pur-(Met)-Pro-(Con)* and *Int-(Pur)-Met-Pro-(Con)*] carried a similar percentage (.625% and .5%).

The findings of this study show that all of the abstract writers have one or more missing rhetorical moves in their abstracts. This finding is despite the rhetorical moves identified by Hyland (2000) being commonly used in abstract writing. Providing the Introduction moves seems to be disregarded by most of the authors. Based on the finding of this study, the majority of the authors (79%) began their abstracts with the Purpose move. This phenomenon could be due to the author's belief that providing the background of the study in the abstract is not necessary for readers to get the essence of their studies. When a move falls below 60 percent, such move can be considered as optional rather than conventional. In this study, three types of Introduction moves structure were identified, namely Problem move, Theory move and a combination of Problem and Theory move. The existence of various forms could be because there are no explicit standard rules for decision on moves for abstracts (Sidek, et.al, 2016).

The findings is consistent with the ones of Tu and Wang (2013) that the majority of the randomly selected from JSLW corpus employed the IPMPrC structure, which was found out to contain 28.8% of the JA abstracts written in this structural pattern. Kanoksilapatham (2005) as quoted in Saeeaw & Tangkiengsirisin (2014) suggested that the presence of the Introduction move reflects the richness of current literature in the fields and, on the other hand, the absence of the move may be due most likely to the relatively short history in the fields. The Introduction move is not considered as conventional (Sidek, et.al, 2016).

In this study, the Purpose move carries 73 percent, a finding, which suggests that this move is a conventional rhetorical move, structure in abstract (Kanoksilapatham, 2005 in Sidek, et.al, 2016). There were 27% of the authors who did not include the Purpose move in their abstracts although the purpose of a study is a pivotal part that is to inform readers of the

main reason the study was conducted. Sidek, et.al (2016) further suggested that the readers should be informed of the purpose of the study since the absence of the Purpose move might be at the expense of the article not being read. Hence, although within the context of this study the abstracts that do not have the Purpose move is regarded as minority comparatively, this finding prevails as an issue of concern as to the reasons those academics overlooked the inclusion of the Purpose move.

Regarding the inclusion of the Method move, 61% of the abstracts contain the Method move. There were 39% of the authors who did not include the Method move in their abstracts. Since the abstracts selected for this study were for empirical studies in nature, if the Method move is absent, an abstract can be considered obscure because the methodology of a research is the index of the legitimacy of the findings of the research (Sidek, et.al., 2016). The absence of the Method move makes the findings presented in the abstract to be questionable because it is missing the basis of how the findings were derived. In addition, this may reflect the author's deficit as an academic author and a researcher. This missing move could also result in the article not being read regardless of the actual quality of the study in the article since an abstract is a gateway to the full article (Hartley & Benjamin, 1998; Swales, 1990 as quoted in Sidek, et.al., 2016).

In relation to the provision of Product move in the abstract, the findings in the present study indicated that the majority of the authors whose abstracts were selected for this study acknowledge the importance of including the Product move in their abstracts. This finding also reflects awareness among the authors that the output of this study must be included in an abstract. Only one abstract is without the Product move; a statistic that can be waived because it could be due to unintentional human error (Sidek, et.al., 2016).

As in the case of the finding of the Purpose move analysis, the majority of the selected abstract (65%) consist the Conclusion move. The Conclusion move comes primarily in the form of a statement of the discussion of implications. This form of Conclusion move is a common concluding remark in an academic research abstract. Since this study does not involve interviewing the authors of the selected abstracts, it is inconclusive as of the reason of the exclusion of the Conclusion move in about 35 percent of the selected abstracts.

In terms of the findings for rhetorical moves sequential structure analysis, the prominent finding is in alignment with the finding for Introduction move analysis. The most prominent moves structure sequence is Purpose-Method-Product-Conclusion (22.5%). The missing moves pattern seems to vary, ranging from a minimum one to maximum three missing moves. In this study, although the three missing moves such as in the Purpose-Conclusion moves structure was only found in one abstract, this finding has a significant adverse notion because it reflects an academic's knowledge and awareness of what an abstract should constitute, which is one of the basic knowledge in research report writing. In general, the various missing moves structures against Hyland's (2000) commonly identified moves structure raises the question on the level and extent of academic research report writing knowledge and skills among academics.

CONCLUSION

From the previous discussion, it can be concluded that the students' abstract writing is thus instrumental in constructing an impression of a writer who has a legitimate place in the scientific discourse community. The structure of I-P-M-Pr-C is most prevalent in the students' abstracts. The analysis also shows that the rhetorical strategies deployed by the scholars in these two applied disciplines are relatively similar. The last deviation from Hyland's model is the move cycling patterns in the field of the English language teaching. When several results are reported serially, some such moves as Methods, Product, and Conclusion are likely to recur in the text a number of times (Saeeaw & Tangkiengsirisin, 2014).

The implications of this study are valuable for didactic purposes, i.e. writing pedagogy. There is a need for language teachers to empower learners with strategies in response to the academic writing. In addition, the implications deal with the description of undergraduate writing. Explicit discussion of language features in moves can be enabling or empowering for student writers who are trying to join a particular scientific community. The third implication concerns future research based on the findings of the present study. it will be interesting to compare the language choices that are made by undergraduates in their abstracts and the ones of expert writers in similar subjects.

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