

A Comparative Analysis of Rhetorical Moves in Undergraduate Thesis Abstracts and Research Article Abstracts

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ABSTRAK

Mempublikasikan karya akademis telah menjadi aspek penting dalam kehidupan akademik mahasiswa. Namun, menulis karya semacam ini tidaklah mudah, terutama bagi mahasiswa *EFL* yang harus menulis tesis dalam bahasa Inggris. Selain itu, editor jurnal harus memilih artikel mana yang akan dipublikasikan dari sekian banyak artikel yang diajukan. Salah satu cara mereka memilih artikel adalah dengan membaca abstrak penelitian. Berbagai penelitian telah menyelidiki abstrak, terutama dalam hal gerakan retorika yang digunakan. Namun, belum ada penelitian yang secara eksplisit berfokus pada perbandingan abstrak skripsi dan abstrak artikel penelitian yang diterbitkan di jurnal bereputasi. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini mencoba mengisi kesenjangan ini dengan membandingkan gerakan retorika yang digunakan dalam abstrak dari kedua kelompok tersebut. Sebanyak 30 abstrak skripsi dan 30 abstrak artikel penelitian dianalisa. Abstrak skripsi diambil dari sebuah universitas swasta di Jakarta Utara, sementara abstrak artikel penelitian diambil dari tiga jurnal SINTA 2. Data dikumpulkan secara manual dan setelah abstrak dikumpulkan, gerakan retorika dianalisa dan dibandingkan antara kedua kelompok ini. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan adanya beberapa persamaan dan perbedaan dalam cara penggunaan gerakan retorika dalam abstrak dari kedua kelompok. Disarankan agar penelitian selanjutnya mengeksplorasi topik ini lebih lanjut dengan memeriksa lebih banyak abstrak serta membandingkan kelompok dari disiplin ilmu yang berbeda.

Kata kunci: abstrak, gerakan retorika, skripsi, jurnal bereputasi

ABSTRACT

Publishing academic work has become an important aspect of students' academic life. Nonetheless, it is not easy to write such work, especially for EFL students who have to write a thesis in English. Moreover, journal editors must select which articles to publish out of the numerous articles that are submitted. One way for them to select these articles is by reading the research abstracts. Various studies have investigated abstracts, especially in terms of the rhetorical moves employed. Nevertheless, no studies have explicitly focused on comparing abstracts of undergraduate theses and abstracts of research articles which are published in reputable journals. Hence, this study attempts to fill this gap by comparing the rhetorical moves used in the abstracts from these two groups. A total of 30 undergraduate thesis abstracts and 30 research article abstracts are analyzed. The undergraduate thesis abstracts are taken from a private university in North Jakarta while the research article abstracts are taken from three SINTA 2 journals. The data is collected manually and after the abstracts have been collected, the rhetorical moves are analyzed and compared between the two groups. The findings revealed that there are some similarities and differences in the way rhetorical moves are utilized in the abstracts from the two groups. It is suggested that future studies explore this topic further by examining a larger number of abstracts as well as comparing groups from different academic disciplines.

Keywords: *abstracts, rhetorical moves, undergraduate thesis, reputable journals*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, publishing academic work has become an increasingly important part of students' academic life. Even in Indonesia, based on government regulations, one of the requirements for students to graduate is to publish their thesis in the university's repository or in academic journals. Nonetheless, it has been found that publishing work written in English, especially in reputable journals, can be quite difficult for nonnative English speakers (Arianto et al., 2021). In fact, some studies have also shown how EFL students struggle with their writing in general (Nugroho, 2017; Tanihardjo, 2017; Tanihardjo, 2019) as they still make various errors in their writing.

In addition, there are many people who wish to get their work published, but there are not that many journals for them to publish their work. Therefore, people must compete with one another to successfully publish in a journal or proceeding. Seeing as there are so many people who send their manuscripts to journals or proceedings, it would also be difficult for the editorial team to select all of the works if they have to go through so many articles from start to finish. Therefore, one of the ways they employ to quickly select the many manuscripts is by reading the abstracts. A well written abstract will have a higher possibility to get published in the journal.

Considering that abstracts are very important, various studies have been done which investigated them. One aspect of abstracts that are commonly investigated is analyzing the rhetorical moves. For example, Kurniawan et al. (2019) explored the rhetorical moves that were used in abstracts from journals with varying Scopus levels. Other studies have

also examined rhetorical moves in abstracts, but from research articles in various journals that are SINTA-indexed (Dardjito et al., 2023; Wijaya & Bram, 2022). There are also studies which investigated abstract moves from journals in different fields of study such as linguistics, economics, psychology, and others (Kurniawan & Sabila, 2021; Nugraha & Mbato, 2022; Obeng et al., 2023; Yoon & Casal, 2020). Besides the rhetorical moves themselves, studies have been conducted which looked at other variables combined with these moves such as the authorial stance in the abstracts (Hu, 2023; Tipu et al., 2022).

Although various studies have been done on rhetorical moves in abstracts, as far as the authors are aware, no studies have explicitly focused on comparing between abstracts of undergraduate theses and abstracts of research articles which are published in reputable journals. Hence, this study attempts to fill this gap by examining these two groups more closely. Based on this background, the researchers formulate the following research questions.

1. What are the rhetorical moves employed in the undergraduate thesis abstracts and research article abstracts?
2. How do the moves compare between the two groups?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With regards to abstracts, rhetorical move is one of the common aspects that is normally investigated by researchers. Move analysis itself is related to the generic structure of writing genres (Vathanalaoha & Tangkiengsirisin, 2018). Swales and Feak (2009) state that genre

deals with specific communicative purposes within a particular discourse. In move analysis, there are normally two parts that are examined, namely moves and steps. It is these two elements that normally form the communicative functions in a text. Abstracts are often considered as a specific genre on their own since they have a different communicative function compared to the actual article they represent (Nurcik et al., 2022). While the article itself functions to inform readers concerning the information presented in the article, its abstract has the purpose of persuading readers to continue reading the whole article (Hyland, 2004).

For the current research, the framework of rhetorical moves that is used is the one from Hyland (2004). An abstract typically contains 5 moves with some moves having several more specific steps. The first move (M1) is Introduction and has 4 steps, some of which include making topic generalizations and identifying the research gap. The second move (M2) is Purpose which only has 1 step which is concerned with asserting the purpose and hypothesis of the study. The third move (M3) is Method which has 3 steps, namely describing the source of data, the research instrument, and the research procedures. The fourth move (M4) or Product only has 1 step, which is related to describing the results of the study. Lastly, the final move (M5) is the Conclusion, which has 4 specific steps, some of which include explanations on the limitations of the current study and describing the recommendations and implications. After analyzing the moves in the abstracts, they are usually classified into 3 categories according to Kanoksilapatham (2005), which are obligatory (100%), conventional (60-99%), and optional (less than 60%). For example, if all of the abstracts that are analyzed use a certain move, then that move would be considered as obligatory as it can be found in 100% of the abstracts.

3. METHODOLOGY

Source of Data

The source of data for the current study is the abstracts from the undergraduate theses and research articles. A total of 60 abstracts from both groups (30 each) are analyzed. The undergraduate thesis abstracts are taken from a private university in North Jakarta while the research article abstracts are taken from three SINTA 2 journals, namely Journal of English Language Studies, English Language Teaching Educational Journal, and Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. The undergraduate thesis abstracts are taken from English Department students, while all of the journal abstracts are from journals specializing in the field of English applied linguistics and are randomly taken from their latest issues.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The data is collected manually by downloading the abstracts from the theses and research articles. After the abstracts have been collected, the rhetorical moves are analyzed and compared between the ones used in the undergraduate theses and the ones used in the research articles. It should be noted however, that the analysis is more focused on the moves rather than the steps. The data is also analyzed qualitatively and not quantitatively as the analysis does not involve the use of any mathematical formulations beyond counting the frequencies and percentages.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Before examining the summary of the usage of the rhetorical moves found in the undergraduate thesis abstracts and research article abstracts, some examples

of the moves and steps are presented and briefly described below.

Move 1 Step 2

“In this digital era, there are many types of audiovisual media that are still inaccessible to the disabled.” (Abstract 7 - undergraduate thesis)

“In the era of digital globalization, online discourse often becomes a battleground of competing ideologies, emotions, and linguistic behaviors, particularly on platforms like Twitter, now known as X.” (Abstract 2 - Journal of English Language Studies)

The second step in Move 1 deals with topic generalizations as part of the Introduction move. From the examples above, it can be seen that both abstracts provide general statements related to the topics of their research. With regards to this move and step, it was found that some of the abstracts from both groups sometimes used several sentences to describe the topic generalizations. In terms of order, it is commonly the opening sentences of the abstracts.

As for the other steps in this move, i.e., arguing for topic significance, defining key terms, and identifying the research gap, they can be found in some of the abstracts (mostly from the research article ones), but not as frequently as the second step.

Move 2 Step 1

“The goal of this research is to identify the grammatical features and analyze the translation strategies used by a machine translation.” (Abstract 10 - undergraduate thesis)

“This study aims to explore the language politeness of elementary school students in daily interactions, analyze the integration of digital literacy in Indonesian language learning, and describe the barriers in

the process.” (Abstract 8 - Journal of English Language Studies)

There is only 1 step in Move 2 which is concerned with describing the purpose of the study. The two excerpts above clearly illustrate the purpose or objective of the corresponding studies, which is commonly related to the research questions proposed in the research. This move and step can usually be identified by the usage of words such as ‘goal’ or ‘aim’ which are present in the examples above.

In terms of the position of this move and step in the abstracts, they can normally be found after the first move. Although, it should be noted that when the Introduction move is not present in an abstract, the first sentence is commonly this one. Moreover, compared to the first move which is usually constructed in several sentences, the Purpose move is generally written in only one or two sentences.

Move 3 Step 1

“The primary source of the data of this research is a diary script.” (Abstract 12 - undergraduate thesis)

“The subject of this research is students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan who have joined International Student Mobility Programs.” (Abstract 14 - English Language Teaching Educational Journal)

Although the third move (Method) consists of three steps, the one that is mostly found in the sixty abstracts under study is step 1, namely describing the participants or source of data. As can be seen from the examples above, the source of data for the studies is explicitly mentioned. For the first one, the main source of data is a diary script, while for the second abstract the source of data or the subject of the study is English department students who have previously

joined the International Student Mobility Programs.

It is worth mentioning that whenever the third move is present in an abstract, it usually does not only consist of one step, but it typically includes more than one. For instance, after stating the source of data, the writers commonly continue with the Method move by explaining about the research instrument or how the data is collected and analyzed. Furthermore, this move is normally found somewhere in the middle of the abstract. From the sixty abstracts that are analyzed, this move is never found at the beginning or at the end.

Move 4 step 1

"The findings reveal numerous errors in ChatGPT's translations, with a notable prevalence of inaccuracies in technical vocabulary." (Abstract 9 - undergraduate thesis)

"The findings disclose that various aspects of outcome-based education are thoroughly addressed in this textbook." (Abstract 16 - English Language Teaching Educational Journal)

Similar to the second move, the fourth move also only has one step, which is related to describing the main findings and results of the study. This move can easily be recognized in an abstract as they generally use the words 'findings' and 'results' in the opening sentences. The sentences that follow elaborate the findings further, but the opening sentences almost always have these two words. In the two examples above, both sentences used the word 'findings.'

Considering that this move is particularly important in an abstract, it is commonly elaborated in several sentences, sometimes even up to four or five sentences. From the sixty abstracts analyzed, there are several abstracts where this one move can take up almost half of

the entire abstract itself. In other words, if the abstract is approximately 300 words, this fourth move can sometimes take up around 100-150 words.

Move 5 Step 2

"This comprehensive analysis highlights the representation of cultural aspects in educational materials, emphasizing their critical role in language education." (Abstract 2 - undergraduate thesis)

"This study contributes to the existing research on constructive alignment in English classroom assessments." (Abstract 26 - Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics)

The final move is the conclusion. There are four steps in this move, but the one that can be frequently found in the abstracts under study (especially from the research article abstracts) is Step 2 which deals with describing the research significance and contribution. As can be seen from the excerpts above, the first one exemplifies the description of the significance of the topic and findings, whereas the second excerpt is an example of a sentence that states the contribution of the research.

Regarding the research significance, one common key word that is usually utilized in this step is the word 'highlight' as in the example above. As for the contribution of the study, it can commonly be identified from the phrase *"This study contributes to ..."* or other similar phrases.

The other three steps in Move 5 can be found in some of the abstracts, but not as frequently as Step 2. Especially for Step 3 which is related to the limitations of the research, very few abstracts employed this particular step. In other words, whenever Move 5 was used in an abstract, the writers preferred to focus on explaining the significance, contribution,

or implications rather than emphasizing on the limitations of the study.

Next, with regards to the usage of the rhetorical moves in the undergraduate thesis abstracts and research article abstracts, as well as the comparison between these two groups, the following two tables summarize what moves are applied by the writers.

Table 1. Summary of Rhetorical Moves in Thesis Abstracts

| <i>Move</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Category</i> |
|-------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| M1 | 19 | 63.33% | Conventional |
| M2 | 27 | 90% | Conventional |
| M3 | 28 | 93.33% | Conventional |
| M4 | 30 | 100% | Obligatory |
| M5 | 10 | 33.33% | Optional |

Table 2. Summary of Rhetorical Moves in Research Article Abstracts

| <i>Move</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Category</i> |
|-------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| M1 | 24 | 80% | Conventional |
| M2 | 29 | 96.67% | Conventional |
| M3 | 30 | 100% | Obligatory |
| M4 | 30 | 100% | Obligatory |
| M5 | 26 | 86.67% | Conventional |

From Table 1, it can be seen that out of the five moves, only Move 4 is obligatory, meaning that all of the 30 abstracts in this group employed this move which deals with the description of the research findings and results. The other moves are either conventional or optional. Move 2 and 3, although categorized as conventional, are still frequently utilized by the undergraduate students in their abstracts as only very few out of the thirty did not use them in their abstracts. On the other hand, only ten students actually implemented Move 5 in their abstracts, while the rest did not. Seeing as only 33.33% used this move, it is categorized as optional.

Additionally, Table 2 above shows that for the research article abstracts, there are two moves that are classified as obligatory, i.e. Move 3 and 4. This means that all thirty abstracts explained about the method as well as the

findings and results of the study. The three other moves all fall under the category of conventional since the percentages for all of them are still higher than 60%.

As for the comparison between the abstracts from the undergraduate theses and the abstracts from the research articles from SINTA 2 journals, it can be said that there are some similarities and differences. In terms of the similarities, Move 4 is obligatory for both groups, and Moves 1 and 2 are conventional. Whereas the differences can be seen in Moves 3 and 5, where Move 3 in the undergraduate thesis abstracts is classified as conventional, while in the research article abstracts it is categorized as obligatory. As for Move 5, in the first group it falls under the category of optional since only 33.33% utilized this move in the abstracts. On the other hand, it is still considered as quite important and conventional in the research article abstracts as this move can be found in 86.67% of the abstracts.

Discussion

Comparing the results of the current research and the findings from previous studies, some similarities and differences can be identified. First of all, just like the results of the study by Hakim et al. (2021), Kurniawan et al. (2019) and Nugroho (2024), it is found that Move 4 is categorized as obligatory, especially in applied linguistics research abstracts. Meaning that all abstracts in this field generally include a description of the findings of the research. It would indeed be strange if an abstract lacks this particular move as it is vital to explain the main findings. Without it, readers would be left wondering what the researchers found after conducting their studies.

Moreover, in line with the findings of the study by Nurcik et al. (2022), Moves 1 and 2 also fall under the category of conventional, which means that not all abstracts employ these two moves. Some abstracts tend to skip the Introduction and directly go to the

objective of the research. This may be due to the fact that abstracts are limited in word count and introductions may take up quite a lot of space. On the other hand, some writers may decide to omit the objective and go directly to the method after describing the introduction, especially if they really want to highlight the current situation regarding the topic under study.

Furthermore, one notable difference between the result of this study and the findings from Herlyna et al. (2024) is that the first Move or the Introduction in their research is obligatory, whereas in the current study it is conventional for both the undergraduate thesis abstracts and the research article abstracts. This previous study also analyzed abstracts from students majoring in Literature and English language department, and the writers argued that the Introduction move is essential since the students felt that they needed to contextualize their research with this move. In contrast, from the undergraduate thesis abstracts analyzed in this current research, it is found that only 19 (63.33%) students utilized the introduction move in their abstracts. It can be assumed that these particular students did not find this move to be mandatory and started their abstracts with the Purpose move. They also probably thought that the first move could take up too much space and decided to focus more on the other moves with the limited word count available to them.

Another noteworthy difference between the results of the study by Herlyna et al. (2024) and the current one is related to Move 4. In their study, this move is categorized as optional since only 47% of the abstracts included it. On the contrary, in the abstracts from both groups in this research, the fourth move is classified as obligatory as all of the abstracts have a description of the findings and results of the study. This is quite surprising as this move is indeed crucial in an abstract since readers would definitely

want to know the results of the study. If this move is missing in a lot of the abstracts from the previous study, it can be said that those abstracts are lacking a key element.

In addition, regarding the answer to the first research question formulated for this study, based on Tables 1 and 2 above, it is found that the undergraduate thesis abstracts and research article abstracts employed all of the five rhetorical moves proposed by Hyland (2004). For the first group, the fourth move is obligatory, Moves 1-3 are conventional, and the last move is optional. In fact, Move 5 is very rarely found in the abstracts as only 10 out of 30 implemented them. A possible reasoning for this is that the students may have felt it was not really necessary to include a conclusion in the abstract as the other moves are probably considered more important. As for the second group, Moves 3 and 4 are obligatory, while Moves 1, 2, and 5 are conventional. Move 1 has the lowest occurrence, probably because the writers wanted to directly go to the other moves rather than spending too many words on general statements in the introduction.

Lastly, with regards to the second research question, when comparing the moves between the undergraduate thesis abstracts and research article abstracts, it is revealed that there are some similarities and differences in the way these moves are utilized. In terms of similarities, Move 4 is obligatory for both groups perhaps because they felt that a good abstract should definitely describe the results of the research. In other words, they both considered this move as a vital element in an abstract. Moves 1 and 2 are conventional for both groups, but Move 1 is not as frequently used in the undergraduate thesis abstracts. It is possible that the students felt that this move is not as essential as the other ones and can be left out. As for the differences, although Move 3 is conventional in the

first group and obligatory in the second group, the difference is not that significant. One notable difference is the usage of Move 5 where it is very rarely used in the undergraduate thesis abstracts but quite frequently found in the research article abstracts. A possible explanation for this is that the students may not consider this move important in an abstract since it is just dealing with the conclusion. On the other hand, the authors of the research article abstracts often used this move to highlight the significance of their study. In other words, they considered this move as important and most of them included them at the end of their abstracts to ensure that the readers are made aware of the significance and contribution of their research.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the results of this study. Firstly, in terms of the rhetorical moves that are employed in the abstracts under study, it can be said that these moves are implemented well since they clearly depict their specific function. For instance, the introduction move clearly illustrates the background of the study, and the method move explicitly describes details related to the source of data, instruments, data collection procedures, etc. Moreover, all five moves are utilized in the abstracts, even though some moves are used more frequently than others. This is also true of the steps in each move where some steps are more commonly applied compared to the other steps. Lastly, regarding the comparison between the usage of the moves in the undergraduate thesis abstracts and research article abstracts, it is found that these two groups share some similarities but still have some differences as well. Hence, it can be concluded that the similarities can be attributed to the fact

that all of the abstracts are from the same academic discipline, namely English language studies, so it may not be surprising that they are similar to some extent since they share similar writing norms. As for the differences, it can be said that the different levels between students who are not accustomed to writing academic work and authors or scholars who have successfully published in reputable journals, may have affected their preference in employing the rhetorical moves in the abstracts.

Considering that this research is quite limited in various aspects, there are two suggestions that are offered. First of all, this study only analyzed 60 abstracts, which is a relatively small number. It is suggested that future studies can investigate a much larger corpus of abstracts. Lastly, the two groups compared in this research are from the same field of study. Hence, it is recommended that future research could compare different academic disciplines in order to get richer and more varied results.

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