

Genre study: Differences in abstracts between Business and Second Language Acquisition research articles

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Abstract: Although business programs are popular in universities, how to teach business writing in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses is understudied. This paper focus on the abstract, the first and a critical part in ESP writing. By comparing abstracts in business and second language acquisition (SLA) research articles (RA), this paper aims to find a better way to improve business abstract writing, and therefore discover a possible suggestion for improving ESP writing curriculum. The findings indicate business abstract focuses on making centrality claims whereas SLA abstract stress on describing methods.

Introduction

Business is one of the most popular majors in western universities, but English-for-specific-purposes (ESP) courses are still in developing teaching business writing (Wood & Appel, 2014). This study focuses on the abstract, which is an essential and distinct type of academic writing (Lopes, 2004). The abstract is an important part of a research article (RA), for it provides a glance at the whole picture and helps readers to decide whether it is necessary to read the paper (Huckin, 2001). Although the previous studies suggest that abstracts should be taken seriously in ESP curriculum, how to teach ESP students to write an effective business abstract remains understudied. This study carries out a cross-disciplinary analysis of abstracts in business and second language acquisition (SLA) RAs. By comparing the abstracts from the disciplines of Business and Applied Linguistics, this research aims to discover their differences and similarities. From the result, this study attempts to provide information in helping ESP programs to improve instruction on writing abstracts for business RAs.

The paper starts with a introduction of the applied theories of this research, followed by a literature review that introduces the research base. After the literature review, the study shows the results of a comparison between three business and SLA abstracts.

Theoretical framework

According to Swales (1990), the rhetorical structure of abstracts is composed of rhetorical moves, which are “bounded communicative acts that are designed to achieve one main communicative objective” (Lopes, 2004, p. 282).

Two move analysis models have been developed on the basis of the ESP rhetorical structure genre analysis: Hyland’s model, and Create a Research Space (CARS) model. This study focuses on Hyland’s model, which claims that abstracts contains rhetorical moves includes introduction, purpose, methods, results/product, and discussion (Hyland, 2004). Furthermore, this study also applies CARS model, for this model is more suit in analyzing business RA abstracts. In CARS, the first rhetorical move aims to establish a territory, and it may include steps such

as claiming the centrality and making a topic generalization. The second move is to establish a niche. In this move, the researchers need to discover research gaps and raise questions in the research field. The last move is to occupy the niche. That is, the researchers need to outline their research purposes and explain how their research will fill the research gaps.

Literature review

Rhetorical move analysis on abstracts

Several studies that applied Hyland’s model to abstracts analysis provide this study with research methods and samples.

Samraj’s (2005) and Amnuai’s (2019) research give examples of applying Hyland’s model to abstract comparison research. Samraj (2005) compares conservation biology and wildlife behavior articles by four moves, which are purpose, methods, results, and conclusions. Amnuai’s (2019) shows an example of using Hyland’s model to analyze accounting RA abstracts, which is a type business abstract.

Differences between business and other academic articles

Vasquez’s (2013) research finds two distinct features of business RAs. First, business RAs face audiences from various of fields, while other RAs are mostly for scholars. Second, business RAs need to be persuasive and how to draw audiences’ attention should be a core concern. These two features gives the study a direction of business abstracts analysis.

Rhetorical moves in business abstracts

Carmen’s (2012) research provides a detailed guide regarding how to structure business writing from the perspective of genre. The study suggests that the abstracts written for empirical business studies usually contain four major components:

1. Problem, purpose or aim of the research, background or focus of study,
2. Method,
3. Findings, and
4. Conclusions/implications/recommendations (p. 216).

Carmen’s study provides rhetorical purposes of each move in business RA’s abstracts, which provide research base for this study.

Methods

This study investigates the rhetorical structure(Swales, 1990)of three Business and three SLA abstracts. All the abstracts were selected from published RAs.

This study follows the principles of Swales’ s (1990) and Samraj’ s(2005)approaches to the analysis of the rhetorical moves which appear in the abstracts, and compares the moves of abstracts published in business and SLA reports to seek responses to the research questions.

For identifying the boundaries between rhetorical moves, this study reviews their rhetorical purposes. This study uses a qualitative top-down method to distinguish the boundaries between moves (Pho, 2008) by the changes in their content. The content of moves is reviewed to identify if their rhetorical purposes have changed.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 and 2 list the rhetorical moves in business and SLA abstract.

Table 1 Rhetorical moves in Business abstracts

	Abstract 1	Abstract 2	Abstract 3
Introduction	1	1	1
Purpose	1	1	1
Methods	0	1	0
Results	1	1	1
Discussion	1	1	0

Table 2 Rhetorical moves in SLA abstracts

	Abstract 1	Abstract 2	Abstract 3
Introduction	0	0	0
Purpose	1	1	1
Methods	1	1	1
Results	1	1	1
Discussion	1	1	0

Table 1 and 2 show that there are no distinctive differences between business and SLA abstract in terms of structure. All of them follows Hyland’ s model, and purpose and result moves are obligatory for both types of abstract.

However, there are two distinctive differences. Business abstracts gives comprehensive introduction and purpose move, whereas these two moves are brief in SLA abstracts. On the contrary, SLA abstracts elaborate on its method move, but business abstracts only give simple introduction of the applied methods.

Introduction move shows the background information, the worthiness of the research, or the maturity of the field. That is, this move claims the centrality of an article. Centrality claim is especially important for business abstracts because those abstracts need to be persuasive (Vasquez, 2013), and a clear centrality claim contribute to a strong necessity of the research, which is the first step persuading the audiences to do what is proposed.

SLA abstracts indicates the method move plays an important part in RAs. However, business abstracts only give simple description of the methods or sometime omit them. Business RAs face readers from various

field (Vasquez, 2013), which means not all readers are scholars. A detailed method move may confuse “non-scholar” readers, and may distract readers from important persuasive information, which is usually shown in result move.

Conclusions and Implications

This research aimed to investigate the similarities and differences between the abstracts written for Business and SLA RAs. The results suggest there are no significant differences between Business abstracts and SLA abstracts. However, business abstracts focuses more on the introduction and purpose move, whereas SLA abstracts stress on the method move.

Several improvement can be done for this study. Firstly, they study can be more generalizable if the sample size is greater. Secondly, this paper only reviews the abstracts of empirical Business RAs, which is only one type of Business writing.

This study may be used as a suggestion for the teaching of Business abstract writing in ESP classes. For instance, instructors may consider rhetorical purposes and the weight of each move when teaching how to write business abstracts.

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