

Rhetorical Pattern of Conference Abstracts: (A Rhetorical Analysis of sampled Abstracts Presented at FISS Conference)

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ABSTRACT: The present study aims to identify the rhetorical pattern of sampled English abstracts of papers presented at the FISS Conference on April 9 and 10 2011 in the University Putra Malaysia (UPM), Malaysia. The theoretical framework of this analysis is based on the Generic Structure Potential model adopted from the Systemic Functional (SF) theory of language and genre (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). The data of the study were drawn from the above-mentioned conference proceedings. The aim of the study is to identify the elements of generic structural potential (GSP) and their sequence which construct the rhetorical pattern of abstract texts. The findings revealed six rhetorically structural elements which include four obligatory elements of Addressing a Framework (AF), Articulating an Objective (AO), Articulating a Method (AM), and Articulating a Result (AR) and two optional rhetorical elements such as Providing Background Information (BI) and Addressing a Problem (AP). Conclusion wise, the following rhetorical pattern was explored and formulated: (BI)^(AP)^AO^AM^AF^AR

Keywords: rhetorical pattern; rhetorical analysis; Generic Structural potential; abstract; conference; Iranian scholar

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing and rhetoric have recently revisited. It is deemed that rhetoric plays a crucial part in influencing the ideation and presentation of (conference) abstracts and might positively impact the major role of abstract texts as to describe the contents and scope of the project as well as to enable readers to perceive its relevance (Moten, 2009).

1.1 Research Questions

Since the study is concerned with rhetorical pattern and abstract texts, the following research questions have been designed:

1. What rhetorical pattern are used in the scholarly abstracts presented at FISS conference?
2. Are there any variations in the elements of the GSP obtained?

1.2 The Theoretical Framework

Introduced by Halliday and Hassan (1989), the concept of Generic Structure Potential (GSP) is designed for any specific contextual configuration (context) to define a genre (pp. 63-65). The GSP model which is driven from the Systematic Functional Theory is a compact statement that shows the elements and the sequence in the structure of a text. These macro-structural elements, irregardless of their size hold the potential or possibility for a text structure or *unity of structure* (macro connexity). The sequenced

elements that make up the GSP of a genre, offer at least a proposition.

Several researchers such as Mitchell (1975) who identified the GSP of the genre of *Shop Transaction* in Libya, Ghadessy (1993) who established the GSP of *Business Letters*, Hasan (1984) and Paltridge (1993) who investigated the rhetorical structure of the Introduction sections of RAs, Henry and Roseberry (1997) who identified the GSP of introductions and endings of forty essays, Fartousi (2012) who identified the rhetorical pattern of conference abstracts using the GSP model, Babaie (2010), Shokouhi and Amin (2010), as well as Ansary and Babaii (2004) who all explored the GSP of English newspaper editorials, applied the theoretical model of the GSP successfully.

Halliday and Hassan (1989) in an attempt to explain the GSP of the "Service Encounter" (or shop transaction) examined a shop transaction text between a customer and shop assistant. They (1989, p 62) believe that any shop transaction is composed of a set of optional and obligatory macro-structural elements ordered specifically. They eventually came out with the following GSP which consists of the elements of Greeting (G), Sale Initiation (SI), Sale Enquiry (SE), Sale Request (SR), Sale Compliance (SC), Sale (S), Purchase (P), Purchase Closure (PC), and Finish (F):

$[(G).(SI)^{+}][(SE.)\{SR^{+}SC^{+}\}S^{+}]P^{+}PC(^{+}F)$

Halliday (1990, p. 34) maintains that the GSP model of the SFL is particularly suitable for any investigatory study that that

... enables us to analyse any passage and relate it to its context in the discourse,

and also to the general background of the text: who it is written for, what is its

angle on the subject matter and so on.

Thus the present study aims to apply the Generic Structure Potential as a theoretical model to delve into the rhetoric of the abstracts presented at FISS conference in 2011.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Rhetoric

As defined by Valero-garces (1996:281), rhetoric is “the strategies the writer uses to convince readers of his/her claims and to increase the credibility of his/her research.” Rhetoric is of two major trends which maintain the term rhetoric in their designations: generative rhetoric which was developed under the influence of Neom Chomsky and the other is contrastive rhetoric (Malmkjaer 2004).

2.2 Abstract

Research article (RA) abstracts are considered the most widely published and most read as well. Moten supports the above claim and adds that abstracts are neither introduction nor conclusion instead they are distillation of research papers or theses. He maintains abstracts are of 250 to 500 words in length and are to identify the project’s objectives, methodology, findings, and conclusions. Abstracts enable the readers to identify the basic contents of the report as well as its relevance (2009).

Salager-Meyer, F. (1991), in an attempt to find out the rhetorical structure of medical abstracts, carried out an analysis of seventy-seven abstracts published between 1987 and 1989. The study used a “move analysis” as the method of analysis and revealed that 48% of the abstracts analyzed were “poorly structured” in a way that they presented discursial deficiency.

The structure of abstracts from a discipline to another, differ to some extent. Sauper & et al. partly supported the above claim by researching the structure of pharmacology, sociology, and Slovenian language and literature abstracts of papers published in international and Slovenian scientific periodicals. The study showed the three disciplines have different information content. The identified differences can in part be associated not only with the disciplines but also with the different role of journals and papers in the professional society as well as the differences in perception of the role of abstracts. The results questioned the structure

of abstracts required by some publishers and international journals (2008).

In a nutshell, thus, a study that concentrates on the identification of the rhetorical pattern of research articles written and presented by Iranian scholars is deemed significant. Hence this study aims to fill up the gap using the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) model of analysis. The GSP model of analysis which seems novel to the domain of rhetorical research, proved appropriate for this rhetorical investigation as well as further research studies in the same or related domain(s).

3. METHOD

3.1 Corpus

The corpus of the study contains five randomized Iranian-written English abstracts in the field of English language and linguistics submitted to the *First Iranian Students’ Scientific* conference. Sponsored by Iran’s embassy to Malaysia, the conference was held in the University Putra Malaysia (UPM) between 9th and 10th April 2011 and accommodated hundreds of papers from twenty-one varied academic disciplines such as English Language, Communication, Economics, Medicine, GIS, Law, Psychology to mention but a few. In the field of English language, a total of twenty-one papers were presented. The researcher, using systematic random sampling method, has collected five papers’ abstracts (out of the population of 23). These abstract texts constructed the data of the small-in-scope corpus as this investigation serves as a journal article rather than a full research paper. Based on the observatory review of the conference proceedings of abstracts, it seemed appropriate to choose the abstracts of the English Language discipline due to their content completeness and English language level of acceptability. The Generic Structure Potential model of Halliday and Hassan (1989) were selected as the framework of the study.

4. ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis is known as one of the competent mode of analysis as it specially serves a solid means to scrutinize discourse. (Fartousi, 2012). Following this statement, the analysis basis of the study relies much on the qualitative approach using a few tables to organize the presentation of findings. Doing so five tables have been designed to better demonstrate the analysis of the rhetorical components in each abstract text. These rhetorical elements/components which are (hereafter) abbreviated include Providing Background Information (BI), Addressing a Problem (AP), Addressing a Framework (AF), Articulating an Objective (AO), Articulating a Method (AM), and Articulating a Result (AR).

The following table shows that only four rhetorical elements: (BI), (AP), (AF), and (AO) are employed in the first abstract text. (AP) has made the largest element with the length of seventy-seven words whereas (BI) occupied

the smallest area of the abstract. Hence the rhetorical structure (GSP) of this abstract is schematized as below:

AI^IP^AF^AO

As to the second abstract text, table two demonstrates four rhetorical elements of (AO), (AM), (AF), (AR) with (AR) and (AM) being considered the largest and smallest elements of the GSP. Thus the following rhetorical structure (GSP) could be formulized:

AO^AM^AF^AR

In table three, four rhetorical elements: (AO), (AM), and (AR) have formulated the rhetorical structure of the third abstract. The GSP could be presented as:

AO^AM^AR

Table 1 – Analysis of Abstract text 1

No.	GSP element identified	Position			Length (in words)	GSP
		Initial	Middle	Final		
1	BI	*			20	AI^IP^AF^AO
2.	AP		*		77	
3.	AF		*		39	
4.	AO			*	25	

Table 2 – Analysis of Abstract text 2

No.	GSP element identified	Position			Length (in words)	GSP
		Initial	Middle	Final		
1	AO	*			31	AO^AM^AF^AR
2.	AM		*		15	
3.	AF		*		33	
4.	AR			*	34	

Table 3 – Analysis of Abstract text 3

No.	GSP element identified	Position			Length (in words)	GSP
		Initial	Middle	Final		
1	AO	*			30	AO^AM^AR
2.	AM		*		46	
3.	AR			*	84	

Table 4 – Analysis of Abstract text 4

No.	GSP element identified	Position			Length (in words)	GSP
		Initial	Middle	Final		
1	AO	*			55	AO^AM^AR
2.	AM		*		18	
3.	AR			*	27	

Table 5 – Analysis of Abstract text 5

No.	GSP element identified	Position			Length (in words)	GSP
		Initial	Middle	Final		
1	AO	*			46	AO^AM^AF^AR
2.	AM		*		29	
3.	AF		*		8	

4.	AR			*	61	
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Table four which is concerned with the fourth abstract text, tabulates three rhetorical elements of (AO), (AM) and (AR) with (AR) and (AO) being considered the smallest and largest elements of the GSP. Thus the following rhetorical structure (GSP) could be schematized:

AO^AM^AR

The following table which illustrates the fifth abstract text, reveals four rhetorical elements: (AO), (AM), (AF), and (AR) are employed. (AR) has made the largest element with the length of sixty-one words whereas (AF) occupied the smallest area of the abstract (8 words long). Hence the rhetorical structure (GSP) of this abstract is schematized as below:

AO^AM^AF^AR

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Findings of the present paper clearly demonstrate that there existed six rhetorical elements in the structure of the sampled abstract texts: Providing Background Information (BI), Addressing a Problem (AP), Addressing a Framework (AF), Articulating an Objective (AO), Articulating a Method (AM), and Articulating a Result (AR). In the light of the analysis, (BI) and (AP) that appeared only in one abstract (abstract one) are considered optional elements whose presence just influence the rhetoric of presentation in the GSP whereas (AO), (AM), (AF), and (AR) are regarded obligatory elements of the GSP of the rhetorical pattern appearing in four of the abstract texts' GSPs. Therefore, the following GSP that represents the rhetorical pattern of the five abstract texts analyzed in the study, was formulated:

(BI)^(AP)^AO^AM^AF^AR

In the above formula, the round brackets indicate optionality of the enclosed elements. Therefore Providing Background Information (BI) and Addressing a Problem (AP) are optional while Articulating an Objective (AO), Articulating a Method (AM), Addressing a Framework (AF), and Articulating a Result (AR) are obligatory i.e. they are deemed the backbone of the abstract texts. The caret sign (^) shows the sequence. Violation of sequence in the above GSP can bring disorder to that section of a text, hence hard to follow.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Hassan Fartousi, an academician and researcher, is working toward a doctorate in the English Language and Applied Linguistics at the University of Malaya – based in Malaysia. As well as Malaysia, He holds 16 years of experience in the English language teaching in the UAE and Iran. Hassan has published and presented papers in Semantics, having a master of TESL from the IIU, a public university in Malaysia. His areas of interest include Rhetoric, writing skill, Semantics, and ELT.

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