

Rhetorical Pattern of Journal Abstracts: A Rhetorical Analysis of Sampled Abstracts Published in the Advances in Asian Social Science (AASS) Journal

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ABSTRACT : The present study served as a research into identifying the rhetorical pattern of sampled scholarly abstracts published in the Advances in Asian Social Science (AASS) journal in March 2012. 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 culled from the website of the above journal: <http://www.worldsciencepublisher.org>. Four scientific journal abstracts which were sampled conveniently in the discipline of English language and linguistics contained the small corpus of the data. The Results revealed five rhetorical elements/components which include three obligatory elements of 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 Framework (AF). To conclude, the following rhetorical pattern was discovered and thus schematized as: $(BI)^{AO}AM^{(AF)}AR$

Keywords: AASS, rhetorical pattern, Generic Structural potential (GSP), abstract, scholars, analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing and rhetoric have recently revisited. It is deemed that rhetoric plays a crucial part in influencing the ideation and presentation of journal 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). Fartousi argues that the meta-structure of research articles' abstracts is always patterned in terms of rhetoric and progression. The rhetoric and progression would contribute to a fluent move toward audience persuasion as it is the chiefly potential purpose of persuasive and argumentative writings (2012).

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 is used in the scholarly abstracts published in the Advances of Asian Social Science journal in the field of English studies?
2. Are there any variations in the elements of the GSPs 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 Systemic Functional Theory is a compact statement that shows the elements and their sequence in the structure of a text. These macro-structural elements, regardless of their size hold the potential or possibility for a text structure or unity of structure (macro connectivity). 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

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

Halliday (1990, p. 34) maintains that the GSP model of the SFL is particularly suitable for any investigatory study 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 [i.e. a thesis abstract] 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 discursual deficiency.

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):

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 published by a scientific journal such as the *Advances of Asian Social Science* (AASS) or any other journal is deemed significant as it might present implications for the journal editors in terms of a generic required structure of paper acceptability. Hence this study aims to fill up the gap using the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) model of analysis and contribute to the serve rhetoricians, pedagogic scholars, journal editors, and researchers as well. Also 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 four conveniently sampled English abstracts published in the first volume (March 2012) of the *Advances in Asian Social Science* (AASS) journal (www.worldsciencepublisher.org) in the field of English language and linguistics. (See appendix I). The AASS journal in its first volume accommodated twenty-two scholarly articles in the field of Social science four of which were concerned with the English language and linguistics. The review articles as well as the articles that revolved around other disciplines than the English language and linguistics were excluded from the study as they follow different rhetorical structures. For this reason, the convenience method of sampling was selected for collecting data.

The Advances in Asian Social Science (AASS) journal that runs under the World Science Publisher center (www.worldsciencepublisher.org) is a digital journal which commenced its official operation at the start of the year 2012 with the rationale of publishing scientific works and contributing to the existing knowledge of social science in Asia. After announcing its first call for paper, WASJ received a flux of scholarly papers in the varied disciplines from scholars of different nationalities. The journal eventually initiated its first official publication in the mid March 2012.

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 four 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), Articulating an Objective (AO), Articulating a Method (AM), Addressing a Framework (AF), and Articulating a Result (AR).

The following table shows that only four rhetorical elements: (BI), (AO), (AM), and (AR) are employed in the first abstract text. (AO) 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:

BI^AO^AM^AR

Table 1 – Analysis of Abstract text 1

No.	GSP element identified	Position			Length (in words)	GSP
		Initial	Middle	Final		
1	BI	*			29	BI^AO^AM^AR
2.	AO		*		68	
3.	AM		*		44	
4.	AR			*	48	

As to the second abstract text, table two demonstrates four rhetorical elements of (AO), (AM), and (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^AR

Table 2 – Analysis of Abstract text 2

No.	GSP element identified	Position			Length (in words)	GSP
		Initial	Middle	Final		
1	AO	*			19	AO^AM^AR
2.	AM		*		9	
3.	AR			*	35	

In table three, four rhetorical elements: (AO), (AM), and (AR) have formulated the rhetorical structure of the third

abstract. (AM) and (AO) are the largest and smallest elements, The GSP could be presented as:

$$AO^{\wedge}AM^{\wedge}AR$$

Table 3 – Analysis of Abstract text 3

No.	GSP element identified	Position			Length (in words)	GSP
		Initial	Middle	Final		
1	AO	*			34	AO [^] AM [^] AR
2.	AM		*		99	
3.	AR			*	47	

The following table which illustrates the fourth abstract text, reveals four rhetorical elements: (AO), (AF), (AM), and (AR) are employed. (AR) has made the largest element with the length of ninety-one words whereas (AM)

occupied the smallest area of the abstract (16 words long). Hence the rhetorical structure (GSP) of this abstract is schematized as below:

$$AO^{\wedge}AF^{\wedge}AM^{\wedge}AR$$

Table 4 – Analysis of Abstract text 4

No.	GSP element identified	Position			Length (in words)	GSP
		Initial	Middle	Final		
1	AO	*			37	AO [^] AF [^] AM [^] AR
2.	AF		*		37	
3.	AM		*		16	
4.	AR			*	91	

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Findings of the present paper clearly demonstrate that there existed five rhetorical elements in the structure of the sampled abstract texts published in the first volume (March 2012) of the World Science Publisher Journal: Providing Background Information (BI), Articulating an Objective (AO), Articulating a Method (AM), Addressing a Framework (AF), and Articulating a Result (AR). In the light of the analysis, (BI) and (AF) that each appeared only in one abstract (25% of the whole data) are considered optional elements whose presence just influence the rhetoric of presentation in the GSP whereas (AO), (AM), 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 four sampled abstracts of the first

volume (March 2012) of the World Science Publisher Journal, analyzed in the study, was formulated:

$$(BI)^{\wedge}AO^{\wedge}AM^{\wedge}(AF)^{\wedge}AR$$

In the above formula, the round brackets indicate optionality of the enclosed elements. Therefore Providing Background Information (BI) and Addressing a Framework (AF) are optional while Articulating an Objective (AO), Articulating a Method (AM), 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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Vitae



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 authored three books, published and presented papers in Semantics, Rhetoric, Writing, and ELT, having a Master's of TESL from the International Islamic University Malaysia. His areas of interest include Rhetoric, writing skill, media discourse, Semantics, and ELT.



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Appendix I

The abstracts of the study

1.
Advances in Asian Social Science 20
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Technology and Language Learning: Language Learners' Attitude

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Abstract –Today, thanks to fast developments in audiovisual technologies, people can have easy access to various audiovisual programs even in remote areas where having access to teachers may be difficult. (In the same line, the present research was set to investigate learners' attitudes toward the use of various audiovisual technologies which can provide authentic language input for language learning in both EFL and ESL contexts. As the matter of fact, the study focuses on different technologies as sources of language input in EFL contexts which lack social interaction as an established source of language input in ESL context. In this regard, a study was conducted with the help of twenty language learners in Iran. In fact, the research was based on a questionnaire which was given to twenty language learners to find out about the attitudes toward the use of different technologies. The results of the questionnaire showed that more than 82% of the participants had positive attitudes toward the use of various technologies. They believed that they have easy access to authentic language input which makes them familiar with the actual use of the language in the real world.

2.

Advances in Asian Social Science 79

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www.worldsciencepublisher.org**Communication apprehension in a foreign language: A case of Iranian EFL learners**

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Abstract-This study aims at investigating the affects of foreign language anxiety on the communicative skills of listening and speaking of a sample of Iranian EFL students. AM. Using correlation technique, the study found that anxiety negatively influence the performance of EFL learners on listening comprehension and speaking. The results have implications for a more anxiety free atmosphere of language learning to produce more autonomous learners.

3.

Advances in Asian Social Science 114

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www.worldsciencepublisher.org**An Investigation on the Effect of Critical Thinking (CT) Instructions on Iranian EFL Learners' Descriptive Writing: Case of Gender Study**

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Abstract: This study aimed to find out whether critical thinking instructions affect Iranian EFL male and female students' descriptive writing, and if there is a significant gender difference in strategy use in the writing performance. After administrating a Nelson (Fowler & Coe, 1976) test, a group of homogeneous university male and female students (60 males and 60 females) were selected from a total population of 170 at the intermediate level in Yasuj University. Then, they were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. The experimental groups received instructions regarding critical thinking instructions respectively, whereas the control ones received Conventional Instruction (CI) method followed an individualistic instructional approach based on the exercises in their regular text books. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the subjects' means and to determine the effect of gender. AM The results depicted that critical thinking instructions had a significant effect on improving Iranian EFL students' descriptive writing ($p < .05$). The results of the analysis also indicated that there were significant differences on the effective use of critical thinking instructions with regard to gender in descriptive writing test performance ($p < .05$). AR

4.

Advances in Asian Social Science 106

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AN ANALYSIS OF INTERCHANGEABILITY AND SYNONYMY OF SELECTED DISCOURSE MARKERS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE HASSAN FARTOUSI

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The paper tries to offer real life responses to the research questions. In doing so, the primary methodological rationale for this research is to exemplify and advocate the use of real performance data called from a large corpus of written language representing actual native use English language. This research deals with the delicate category of synonymy and interchangeability of selected troublesome discourse markers from the point of view of the concepts of 'invariant meaning' and 'markedness theory'. Two hypotheses, synonymy and non-synonymy are presented for this paper. The theoretical and methodological foundations underlying this investigation are invariant meaning, synonymy and non-synonymy hypotheses, markedness and distinctive feature theory, student survey, and discourse analysis. Two reliable dictionaries, American Heritage Dictionary and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English have been employed in this research. The results of this study show that although the two discourse markers *for example* and *for instance* are, in practice, used interchangeably by non-native English speakers, they are neither synonym nor interchangeable.