

The Study of Research Article Abstracts in the Applied Linguistic Discipline

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Abstract

Rhetorical studies on research article abstracts have been a growing concern of linguistic scholars, but what sentences to express communicative functions within abstracts have been very rarely found. In responding to this minor attention, this study intends to investigate abstract length, communicative functions, sentence forms to realize communicative functions, syntactic forms to realize communicative functions, and tense forms to realize communicative functions within abstracts. In this study, ten research article abstracts from the applied linguistic disciplines published in reputable journals were analyzed using some earlier frameworks. The results showed that the abstract section contains 160,9 words, with 6,7 sentences on average per research article. These sentences were distributed in five communicative functions, but of the five, only two of them are obligatory in research article abstracts. Other findings related to sentences to express these five communicative functions within the abstract section are described in the results and discussion sections. The findings of this study may significantly contribute to theoretical and practical bases in genre of research article abstracts.

Keywords: *Applied linguistics discipline, research article abstracts, rhetorical structures, sentences to realize communicative functions*

Introduction

The research article abstract plays a vital role in conveying the fundamental current research because it functions to present a concise summary of the complete research, including a brief outline of the study inquiry, methods, findings, and conclusions. Thus, it received much linguist attention for the investigation. However, among the abstract studies, a rhetorical structure in the abstract section dominated the investigation over the others and was investigated in various genre (Alzarieni et al., 2019; Arsyad, 2014; Can et al., 2016; Doró, 2013; Loan, 2018). Rhetorical structures of abstracts have been investigated comparatively between those written by Turkish and non-Turkish academics (Fatma & YAĞIZ, 2020), in less prestigious and more prestigious journals (El-Dakhs, 2018), by United States and Iraqi authors (Friginal & Mustafa, 2017), in Ecuadorian and English article abstracts (Tovar-Viera, 2019; Tovar Viera, 2020), and in conference and article abstracts (Zibalas & Šinkūnienė, 2019), and many more. All these studies imply that rhetorical structure in research article abstracts plays an important role in linguistics study.

In a single corpus, it has been conducted in thesis abstracts (Kosasih, 2018). In this study, data were extracted from forty English thesis abstracts in State University of Banten from four disciplines: master of management, master of fisheries management, master of public

administration, and master of mathematics education. These data were evaluated using Bhatia's four-move pattern (Bhatia, 1993) and Swales & Feak's five-move pattern (Swales & Feak, 2004). These two frameworks were used to examine and code data. Besides, the verb tense employed in each abstract was also evaluated, including the present, past, and present perfect tenses. The results revealed that three functional moves Aim-Method-Result (A-M-R) were employed in the majority of thesis abstracts across all fields. However, only 15% of the abstracts matched Swales and Feak's five-move structure, whereas 10% matched Bhatia's four-move model. Then, each abstract across the four fields employed more of the present and past tense.

Such a rhetorical study has also been conducted in 60 research article abstracts written in Arabic within the discipline of Humanities (Alzarini et al., 2019). The identification of moves was accomplished by analyzing the communicative purpose of each text unit in the abstracts, using a modified version of Swales' CARS model and Aragonés's framework. The study discovered five mandatory moves and one optional move. The obligatory moves are Move 1 (Introducing the invention), Move 3 (Objectives of the invention), Move 4 (Utility/findings), Move 5 (Technical Characteristics), and Move 6 (Advantages). This finding was used as a proposed model for generating patent abstracts in Arabic. However, Move 2- Problem-solution was optional in the data.

Another rhetorical analysis within abstracts has been carried out in the fields of applied linguistics and educational technology, and the results revealed that there are essential abstract components: presenting the research, describing the methodology, and summarizing the results (Loan, 2018). In this finding, the verb tense distribution of the summarizing results closely resembled that describing the method used past tense over the present tense. These findings may contribute to academic writing courses designed for graduate students, especially those who come from non-English speaking backgrounds.

In a different context, a rhetorical study was also conducted in English abstracts published in Indonesian national journals from three different disciplines: education, economy and management, and humanity (Arsyad, 2014). In this study, voice forms, tenses, and that-compliments were also investigated in these three data sets. For the analysis, a five-communicative-moves model was employed (BPMRD) to identify moves in this study. The results revealed that the majority of research article abstracts in this study use purpose, method, and results (PMR), while background and discussion (BD) seem unimportant in these three data sets because only a small number of them employed these two communicative functions. In realizing these communicative moves, authors preferred employing active voices and present tenses, while they only employed a that-compliment in the resulting move. However, the status of whether the journals in this study are accredited is not clearly mentioned.

In addition, a research article abstract has also been analyzed in the discipline of applied linguistics published in reputable journals (Warsidi, 2021b) to identify how to begin writing research article abstracts. In this study, 40 abstracts were analyzed by understanding the communicative functions in the beginning abstracts. The results showed two communicative functions appeared in the beginning abstracts; they are claiming centrality and presenting purposes. However, the majority of authors employed claiming centrality more than presenting purposes. They realize these communicative functions by using active forms and simple sentences.

The above reviews show that rhetorical studies in research article abstracts have been carried out in many linguists' academic works. However, such studies in the abstract section have also been conducted contrastively. For example, it has been investigated in Dental research article abstracts from both Thai and foreign journals utilizing the Background, Purposes, Method, Results, and Discussion (BPMRD) analysis framework (Vathanalaoha & Tangkiengsirisin, 2018). This study utilized linguistic characteristics to identify the differences between Thai and international dental research article abstracts. The findings revealed that Thai writers tend to ignore Move B, although the other moves showed similarities between Thai and foreign research article abstracts. Then, Thai authors excluded self-referential pronouns and minimized the use of modalities. Besides, they sometimes tended to employ that-complement clauses.

Besides, a comparative study was conducted on 400 research paper abstracts published in more and less prestigious linguistics journals (El-Dakhs, 2018). The study employed Hyland's 5-move model to analyze the rhetorical structure, facilitating seamless application and comparison with other investigations. The results revealed that functional moves of "Purpose-Method-Findings-Conclusion" are the predominant structure found in both more and less prestigious journals. However, abstracts published in less prestigious journals tend to be longer for their introduction, purpose, and technique moves, while abstracts in more prestigious journals have longer texts for presenting their findings. Abstracts published in less prestigious journals demonstrate a notable increase in the usage of transitions, frame markers, and evidential. On the other hand, abstracts published in more prestigious journals display a greater utilization of code glosses, hedges, boosters, and self-mentions.

Furthermore, a contrastive rhetorical study in the abstract section has been tested between those found in 50 research articles and 50 conference papers published in 2015 and 2016 (Zibalas & Šinkūnienė, 2019). In this study, an earlier analytical framework in the research article abstract (Swales & Feak, 2010) was employed for analyzing the data sets. The findings indicate that the structure of both types of abstracts is typically similar, as both data sets incorporate four communicative functions - 'Background', 'Purpose', 'Methods', and 'Results'. In this regard, 'Purpose' was the most frequent and promotional in both data sets. To realize this most important functional move, research article authors commonly utilized inanimate subjects paired with active verbs or passive constructions, while conference authors employed personal pronouns more frequently.

In addition, a contrastive rhetorical study in the abstract section has been conducted in research article abstracts in two different disciplines: applied linguistics and economics (Ebrahimi & Chan, 2015). In this study, both data sets were published in 2020-2011 using the introduction, method, results, and discussion (IMRD) format. The analysis was conducted using an earlier analytical approach (Gosden, 1993). The results showed variations in the discourse functions performed by both groups of research articles. The disciplinary variations were found not only in four grammatical subjects and their subcategories but also in how these two data sets depict and harmonize the expression of these four grammatical subjects (GSs). In this regard, while 80% of the GSs in Applied Linguistics abstracts tend to prioritize topic-based content and emphasize research findings, the Economics article authors prominently emphasized the findings, the research subject, and the authors' perspectives to construct RA abstracts.

The reviews above suggest that rhetorical structures within research article abstracts have received huge numbers of scholarly attention and indicate very important to be

investigated. However, although such studies have been conducted widely both in a single corpus or comparative corpora, and communicative functions have been identified, several questions in research article abstracts still strongly need further investigation. For example, how long should research article abstracts ideally be? What sentence form to communicate BPMRD? What syntactic sentence do authors employ to communicate BPMRD? What tense do authors use? All these remaining questions need to be proven scientifically to provide evidence for language learners, novice authors, and English foreign language authors. In responding to this fundamental need, the present study intends to analyze the rhetorical structures of research article abstracts in applied linguistics published in reputable international journals with the following research questions:

1. What is the length of the abstract section in applied linguistics research articles published in reputable international journals?
2. What communicative functions do authors employ?
3. What sentence forms do authors employ to realize their communicative functions?
4. What syntactic form do authors employ to realize their communicative functions?
5. What tense do authors employ to realize their communicative functions?

Method

Data sets

This study analyzed ten research article abstracts in the applied discipline published in reputable journals. The reason for employing this corpus as a data set is that these abstracts were published in five prestigious journals in applied linguistics with Scopus-indexed Q1 and Scimago Journal Ranks (SJR) above 0,61, which may apply a quality standard for good abstracts. These abstracts were published in the journals: *Applied Linguistics*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *English for Specific Purposes*, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, and *Linguistics and Education*. To meet ten research article abstracts from these selected journals, this study selected two abstracts from each journal randomly, without any tendencies.

Data analysis

For analyzing a data set, this study used several frameworks to answer the research questions in the present study based on the data analysis. To discover the abstract length, this study employed computer-assisted counts using a Word office. Then, to discover the rhetorical structure of the abstract section, this study used a BPMRD framework found in earlier studies (Arsyad, 2014; Swales & Feak, 2010; Swales et al., 2009) for analyzing the communicative functions with the abstract section.

For analyzing sentence forms, this study used earlier analytical frameworks (Mustika, 2017; Warsidi, 2021a, 2021b). Besides, it also utilized a syntactic framework for analyzing syntactic sentences (Verspoor & Sauter, 2000; Warsidi, 2021a). Furthermore, it also used tense comprehension to identify whether sentences in research article abstracts use simple or past tenses. All these frameworks aim to analyze the data to answer the research questions in the present study.

Results

The length of the research article abstracts

After analyzing research article abstracts in the applied linguistics discipline published in reputable journals, the results showed that each abstract section contains 160,9 words and 6,7 sentences on average. More details about abstract length in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Abstract lengths in applied linguistics research articles published in reputable journals

The length of abstracts	Total Numbers
Total word numbers	1609 words
The least word numbers in an abstract	121 words
The highest word numbers in an abstract	203 words
The average word numbers per abstract	160,9 words/ abstract
Total sentence numbers	67 sentences
The least sentence numbers in an abstract	5 sentences
The highest sentence numbers in an abstract	10 sentences
The average sentence numbers per abstract	6,7 sentences/ abstract

As shown in Table 1, each abstract section contains at least 121 words and a maximum of 203 words. It also contains at least five sentences and a maximum of ten sentences. These word and sentence numbers were distributed into five communicative functions. Then, the employments of these five communicative functions are presented in the following subsection.

The rhetorical structures of research article abstracts

Based on the analysis results, this study reports five communicative functions appearing in research article abstracts in the applied linguistics discipline published in reputable journals. However, of these five communicative functions, three of them appeared in all data, while the other two were only partially employed in the abstracts. More information about the data analysis regarding these five communicative functions found in the abstract section is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Rhetorical structures of applied linguistics research article abstracts published in reputable journals

Communication functions	Numbers of appearances	Percentages of appearances	Level of importance
Move 1: Presenting background	4	40%	Optional
Move 2: Presenting purposes	10	100%	Obligatory
Move 3: Presenting methods	10	100%	Obligatory
Move 4: Presenting results	10	100%	Obligatory
Move 5: Presenting discussion/ conclusion	7	70%	Conventional

As presented in Table 2, Move 2 (presenting purposes), Move 3 (presenting methods), and Move 3 (presenting results) appear in all 10 abstracts. This finding implies that these three communicative functions are obligatory in research article abstracts in the applied linguistics discipline published in reputable journals. However, Move 1 (presenting background) seems only optional, while Move 5 (presenting discussion/ conclusion) is conventional in the present study. More details about the ways authors employed these five communicative functions found in the present study are exemplified as follows:

Move 1: Presenting backgrounds

In this communicative function, authors present the importance or the urgency to conduct their present study. However, this communicative function only appears in 40% of the total abstracts. Here are the examples found in the data analysis results:

Extract 1: Linguistic features used to highlight findings, concepts, ideas, and their significance **are ubiquitous in academic writing**. 03

Extract 2: Despite extensive research conducted into language teacher education practices and outcomes, student teachers' uptake of innovative practices **is still largely unexplored**. 08

In extracts 1 and 2 above, the authors imply that their current research topics are important for investigation, and this claim became their reason to conduct their current study. By presenting the importance, they may intend to attract attention from their journal gatekeepers. By doing so, they expect that their research paper has a possibility of being accepted and published.

Move 2: Presenting purposes

This communicative function aims to announce the authors' current study and it appears in all research article abstracts in the present study. The ways authors used this move are exemplified as follows:

Extract 3: **This study aims** to describe the rhetorical features of Japanese and English research article introductions (RAIs) in the discipline of Japanese Literature. 05

Extract 4: **This study examined** the perception of 15 graduate student teachers of a unique haptic (movement and touch) pronunciation teaching method in which they were trained. 08

The above examples show the ways authors announce their current study. In extract 3, the author presents an intention in the present tense, while in extract 4, the author uses the past tense. However, their purposes are similar, intending to present their purpose in their current study.

Move 3: Presenting methods

This communicative move presents methods, data sets, data collection, analytical procedures, participants, instruments, etc. This move is also obligatory in research article abstracts in the present study. Here are examples found in the data analysis results:

Extract 5: In this study, **174 children aged 5- to 9 years old completed a test** of homonym knowledge, and measures of non-verbal intelligence and language background were collected. **Psycholinguistic features** of the word forms tested **were assessed** by collecting adult ratings, corpus coding, and using existing databases. 01

Extract 6: **Focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, and weekly observations were triangulated** over a period of 16 weeks to attain insights into participants' perceptions of haptic pronunciation teaching. 08

The bolded texts as presented in extracts 5 and 6 indicate the presentation of the research method. In extract 5, both participants and analytical procedures are presented. In extract 6, various collected data were analyzed using a triangulated approach. Thus, these two examples are included in this move because the function is to present a research method.

Move 4: Presenting results

This move is obligatory as it appears in all data in the present study. In this regard, authors announce their research findings. More details about the ways authors use this communicative function are exemplified as follows:

Extract 7: Logistic mixed effects models **revealed that** whilst the frequency of wordforms contributed to children's knowledge, so also did dominance and imageability of the separate meanings of the word. Predictors were similar for children with English as an Additional Language and English as a first language. 01

Extract 8: **The findings offer evidence** of intra-disciplinary variation in discursal preferences and hopefully contribute to our understanding of both the journal and our field. 04

Extract 7 above shows the results of using models, while extract 8 presents the findings of the author's current study shortly as evidence. All these two examples imply that they report the findings of their current research findings.

Move 5: Presenting discussion/ conclusion

This move appears in the part of the abstract section. However, not all research article abstracts employ this communicative function, only 70% of the total corpus. Thus, it is conventional in the present data. More details are exemplified in the following extracts:

Extract 9: This greater understanding of why some word meanings are known better than others **has significant implications** for vocabulary learning. 01

Extract 10: **It was concluded** that the Japanese and the English RAIs were organized in a way to satisfy local and international audiences' expectations, respectively. 05

The two extracts above appear in the last sentence of the abstract section. Extract 9 indicates that the author concludes the abstract by presenting the implication of learning, while extract 10 explicitly presents the conclusion as bolded.

Sentence forms in research article abstracts

In realizing communicative functions in research article abstracts, authors tend to employ active sentences more than passive sentences, except in the presenting method. More information about the analysis results regarding the sentence form with an abstract section is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Sentence forms within communicative functions of applied linguistics research article abstracts published in reputable journals

Communication functions	Sentence distribution		Total sentence numbers
	Active sentences	Passive sentences	
Move 1: Presenting background	4	1	5
Move 2: Presenting purposes	13	0	13
Move 3: Presenting methods	8	9	17
Move 4: Presenting results	23	2	25
Move 5: Presenting discussion/ conclusion	4	3	7
Total sentences	52	15	67

Table 3 above shows active sentences are more dominant in research article abstracts, either in presenting background, purposes, results, or conclusions. However, in the presenting method, authors tend to use passive sentences more than active sentences.

Syntactic sentences in the research article abstracts

In presenting communicative purposes, of the total sentence numbers, complex sentences dominated over the other syntactic sentences. More details about syntactic sentences in research article abstracts found in the present study are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Syntactic sentences within communicative functions of applied linguistics research article abstracts published in reputable journals

Communication functions	Sentence distribution				Total sentence numbers
	Simple sentences	Compound sentences	Complex sentences	Compound-complex sentences	
Move 1: Presenting background	3	1	1	0	5
Move 2: Presenting purposes	6	0	6	1	13
Move 3: Presenting methods	11	1	5	0	17
Move 4: Presenting results	7	0	16	2	25
Move 5: Presenting discussion/ conclusion	3	0	4	0	7
Total sentences	30	2	32	3	67

As shown in Table 4 above, authors employ more simple sentences to present their backgrounds and methods in their abstracts, but they employ more complex sentences to present results and conclusions. However, of the total sentence numbers, complex sentences are the most dominant syntactic choice in research article abstracts in the present study. This finding implies that authors prefer communicating their abstracts in complex ways.

Tense forms in the research article abstracts

In writing research article abstracts, authors tended to use present tense more than past tense, including in presenting background, purposes, methods, and conclusion. However, in presenting results, the authors used more past tenses than the present tense. More details about the analysis results regarding the uses of tense within research article abstracts are described in Table 5.

Table 5. Tense forms within communicative functions of applied linguistics research article abstracts published in reputable journals

Communication functions	Sentence distribution		Total sentence numbers
	Present tense	Past tense	
Move 1: Presenting background	5	0	5
Move 2: Presenting purposes	9	4	13
Move 3: Presenting methods	11	6	17
Move 4: Presenting results	11	14	25
Move 5: Presenting discussion/ conclusion	6	1	7
Total sentences	42	25	67

Table 5 above presents the summary analysis results. It shows that authors used more present tenses than the past tense to present all communicative moves, except in presenting results. In presenting results, they used more past tenses than the present tense. The reason may be that results aim to report the analysis results that have been conducted.

In short, this study revealed that abstract sections in applied linguistics research articles published in reputable international journals contain 160,9 words per article abstract. To realize abstracts, authors employed five communicative functions, but of the five, three of them are obligatory: presenting purposes, present method, and presenting results. Then, to realize their abstracts, authors utilized more active sentences than passive ones, except in presenting a method. Furthermore, they used more simple sentences to present their backgrounds and methods in their abstracts, but they employed more complex sentences to present results and conclusions. Finally, they tend to use the present tense more than the past tense, except in presenting results.

Discussion

After analyzing research article abstracts in the applied linguistics discipline, the results showed that an abstract in the applied linguistics in the present study contains 160,7 words with 6,7 sentences in average length. This finding implies that an abstract has very short information about the current research. This length seems a bit shorter compared to those in applied linguistic article abstracts published long earlier in 2010-2011 as they have 174,63 words (Ebrahimi & Chan, 2015), and 175,24 word lengths (Deveci, 2019). However, this length number is more than those in the economy as they have 147,57-word lengths (Ebrahimi & Chan, 2015).

Of these abstract lengths, abstracts are divided into five communicative functions: background, purposes, method, results, and discussion/ conclusion (BPMRD). However, while PMR is obligatory in the present study, D is conventional, and B is optional. This rhetorical finding indicates that PMR is very pivotal in research article abstracts in the applied linguistics discipline. It seems similar to those found in earlier findings (Pho, 2008; Vathanalaoha & Tangkiengsirisin, 2018) that PMR is obligatory in research article abstracts, but it seems a bit different from conference abstracts (Ziblas & Šinkūnienė, 2019) as none of these communicative functions are obligatory. However, although these are not obligatory, their appearances in abstract sections indicate very important. Thus, this study and this discussion imply that PMR are important moves in research article abstracts.

To realize the five communicative functions, authors in the present study tend to use active sentences more than passive ones, except in presenting the method. This finding indicates that authors tend to show their agencies more rather than hide them. It is similar to my earlier study that active sentences dominated the background of article abstracts (Warsidi, 2021b). It also seems similar to an earlier study as abstracts in education, economics, and humanities to used active forms (Arsyad, 2014). However, in presenting a method in abstracts, authors in the present study tend to use passive forms, which means hiding their agencies. The reason may be that authors want to show their focus on presentation. In this regard, they focus on presenting research methods, and thus, any information about methods may be better located and placed as subjects because they aim to show the ways method used for their data analysis and to convince their targeted readers. This finding is also similar to an earlier study that presenting the method in the abstract section in the disciplines of public administration, management, and fisheries management was dominated in passive forms (Kosasih, 2018). The reason for this difference may be that the disciplinary and journal selections are varied, and thus, they may have different sentence conventions.

Concerning syntactic forms, authors in the present study used more complex sentences than the other sentence types, particularly in presenting results and conclusions. The reason may be that authors need complex language to express their research findings within the abstract section. However, in presenting the background, purpose, and method, the authors used simple sentences more than the other syntactic sentences. This finding seems similar to my earlier finding that to begin research article abstracts, authors used more simple sentences (Warsidi, 2021b), and also whole sections (Warsidi, 2021a).

In terms of tense forms, most authors used present tense more, except for presenting results. In presenting results, authors tend to employ past tenses. The reason may be that their analysis has been conducted in the past, and thus, they used past tense more to present their research findings in the abstract section. This finding seems similar for all communicative functions from earlier studies, except in presenting results. In presenting results, the present finding indicates that authors used more past tenses, while earlier studies in the disciplines of education, economics, and humanities still favored employing present tenses (Arsyad, 2014). In this regard, different disciplinary and journal conventions may be the difference in this variation.

Conclusion

After analyzing the data, reporting the results, and discussing them with earlier studies, this study finally concludes with five important results for responding to the research questions in the present study. Firstly, the analysis results revealed that the abstract section contains 160,9 words in length on average, with 6,7 sentences per abstract. Secondly, these sentences were distributed into five communicative functions (BPMRD. However, PMR is obligatory, while B is optional, D is conventional. Thirdly, authors tend to use active sentences more, except in presenting method. Fourthly, they tend to employ complex sentences in presenting an abstract section, more particularly in presenting results and conclusions. Finally, they tend to use present tense sentences, except in presenting results.

Unfortunately, this study only analyzed the abstract section from one disciplinary article. As a result, it cannot generalize the findings in other disciplinary article abstracts. However, although it is limited to one disciplinary corpus, it covers a lot of research objectives, including abstract length, communicative functions within abstracts, sentence forms, syntactic sentences, and tense forms to express communicative functions. Thus, it may contribute significantly to both theoretical insights within the literature regarding genre studies within research article abstracts and practical implications to design teaching material for writing a publication of research articles. However, because this study is limited to one disciplinary corpus in reputable journals, further studies that may expand and confirm this present study are recommended. Besides, more corpus numbers or comparative analyses about genre studies in research article abstracts are also very welcomed.

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