Rhetorical Moves Analysis of RA Abstracts in English Applied Linguistics and Psychology Journals

Ardi Nugroho
Bunda Mulia University
ardin4382@yahoo.com
Corresponding email: ardin4382@yahoo.com

Abstracts are essential in a research as it provides an overview of the article itself. Considering its importance, numerous studies on abstracts have been done. Nonetheless, to the best of the writer's knowledge, few have directly compared the abstracts of research articles (RA) in English applied linguistics and psychology journals. This study is aimed at filling this gap by investigating what rhetorical moves are found in the research article abstracts in these two groups. This study analyzed 20 abstracts taken from 4 national journals. More specifically, 10 abstracts from 2 applied linguistics journals and 10 from 2 psychology journals. All 4 journals are SINTA accredited with a rank of 2 and 3. All of the abstracts are randomly taken from the latest issue from each journal. To analyze the rhetorical moves, the framework from Hyland (2000) was utilized. Findings showed some similarities and differences in terms of what moves were found in the abstracts. Some moves were categorized as obligatory while others were classified as conventional and optional. The findings seem to suggest that the abstracts from both groups generally employed similar moves as they both fall under the soft science field. Seeing as these abstracts are taken from reputable journals (Sinta 2 and 3), it is suggested that researchers employ similar moves when composing their abstracts in these fields of study.

Keywords: *Abstract; Applied Linguistics; Psychology; Rhetorical Moves*

Introduction

In a research article (RA), an abstract is commonly the first part that is read by people since it serves as a sort of summary of the content of the entire article. By reading the abstract, readers could get an idea of what to expect from the article. In addition, when it comes to publishing in scholarly journals, editors also refer to abstracts to help decide whether the submitted work should be considered for further review and whether it would eventually be published in the journal (Fauzan et al., 2020).

Moreover, when publishing in international reputable journals, research articles are normally expected to be written in English, including the abstract. Nonetheless, it should be noted that writing an abstract may prove to be rather challenging, especially for nonnative speakers of English (Arianto et al., 2021). As a matter of fact, it has been found that many Indonesian scholars in social sciences and humanities field face difficulties in getting their work published in prestigious international journals because their abstracts normally only have three moves while international authors may employ four or five moves in their abstract

(Arsyad, 2018). Additionally, it is not only experienced Indonesian scholars that face this problem, but undergraduate and graduate students as well. Due to the government regulations, students are also required to publish their work as part of their graduation requirements. However, many students still lack the proper writing skills and still make errors such as lexical collocational errors (Nugroho, 2017; Tanihardjo, 2017) or even errors in producing phrasal verbs (Tanihardjo, 2019). Therefore, abstract writing has become a topic of interest for many researchers over the years due to its significance in the academic world.

There are various aspects of abstracts that have been previously analyzed by researchers, one of them involves analyzing rhetorical moves or move analysis. Essentially, move analysis is concerned with examining the generic structure of writing genres (Vathanalaoha & Tangkiengsirisin, 2018). There are commonly two elements in move analysis, namely moves and steps. The communicative functions in a text are generally constructed through these two elements. Genre itself is described by Swales and Feak (2009) as a set of discourse with specific communicative purposes. Seeing as abstracts are considered as a genre of its own because it has its own communicative function which is different from the actual article it represents (Nurcik et al., 2022), it is not surprising that many researchers focused their study on investigating the rhetorical moves found in abstracts. For instance, a study by Kurniawan et al. (2019) investigated the rhetorical moves in applied linguistics abstracts from journals with different Scopus quartiles. Not only in Scopus quartiles, but studies have also examined the rhetorical moves of research articles in SINTA-indexed journals (Dardjito, 2023; Wijaya & Bram, 2022). Other studies have examined the rhetorical moves and how they are linguistically realized in abstracts from several fields such as applied linguistics, economics, law, psychology, sociology, and tourism (Khany & Malmir, 2019; Kurniawan & Sabila, 2021; Nugraha & Mbato, 2022; Obeng et al., 2023; Yoon & Casal, 2020). There are also studies which compared between different groups of writers, e.g., native speakers and nonnative speakers of English, in terms of how they utilized the rhetorical moves in their research article abstracts (Liu et al., 2022; Simanjuntak, 2022; Tocalo, 2021; Viera, 2019), as well as studies which focus on nonnatives (Amoakohene et al., 2024; Herlyna et al., 2024; Juanda & Kurniawan, 2020;). In addition, some studies focused not only on the rhetorical moves in the research article abstracts but on other aspects such as the authorial stance (Hu, 2023; Tipu et al., 2022) or translation (Li, 2020).

Although several studies on rhetorical moves in abstracts have been previously conducted, to the best of the writer's knowledge, few have directly compared the rhetorical moves in abstracts from two fields of study, namely applied linguistics and psychology. Therefore, the current study aims to fill this gap by examining how research article abstracts from these two groups employ rhetorical moves. More specifically, the writer proposes the following two research questions to limit the direction of the research:

1. What rhetorical moves can be found in the research article abstracts from applied linguistics and psychology journals?
2. What rhetorical moves patterns are employed in the research article abstracts from applied linguistics and psychology journals?

Research Methodology

The source of data for the current study is taken from 20 abstracts written by Indonesian scholars. More specifically, 10 abstracts are taken from two applied linguistics journals and the remaining 10 abstracts are taken from two psychology journals. All four journals are national journals with SINTA accreditation. The following is the list of all four journals with their SINTA rank:

1) Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (S2)
2) Eternal - English Teaching Journal (S3)
3) Journal of Educational. Health, Community Psychology (S2)
4) Gajah Mada Journal of Professional Psychology (S3)

A total of five research article abstracts are randomly taken from the latest issue for each journal. These four journals were selected since they all have relatively high SINTA ranking which reflects the quality of the articles published in these journals. In other words, it can be assumed that the research articles published in these journals are of high quality and that they can serve as good examples of articles in the field of applied linguistics and psychology.

To analyze the rhetorical moves from the collected abstracts, the framework from Hyland (2000) is utilized in this study. There are essentially 5 moves in Hyland's framework of rhetorical moves for abstracts, and some of the moves include some more specific steps. The 5 moves include: Introduction (M1), Purpose (M2), Method (M3), Product (M4), and Conclusion (M5). The first move has 4 steps such as arguing for topic significance and identifying research gap; the second move has only one step, namely stating the purpose and hypothesis; the third move has 3 steps, one of them is explaining the source of data; the fourth move also only has 1 step which is describing the findings and results of the study; and the last move has 4 steps such as explaining the limitation of the study. Nonetheless, in the current study, the steps are not analyzed in detail since the focus is kept on the occurrence of the general moves. After analyzing the moves and steps, they are classified into three categories from Kanoksilapatham (2005), namely obligatory (100%), conventional (60-99%), and optional (less than 60%). Lastly, besides examining the moves that are found in the abstracts from both groups (applied linguistics and psychology journals), the pattern of the moves is also analyzed.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The following are some examples of moves and steps that were found in the abstracts. It should be noted that even though the steps are mentioned here, they are not individually counted and analyzed and are instead grouped into the moves in which they belong.

Move 1 Step 1

"The importance of learning English skills, namely reading aimed at improving English mastery, is very important for students." (Abstract 2, Eternal - English Teaching Journal (SINTA 3))

The sentence above is an example of move 1 (Introduction) and step 1 (arguing for topic significance). This is actually the very first opening sentence of the abstract, that is why

it can be considered as part of the introduction. This sentence also serves as a sentence that highlights the significance of the topic that is currently being investigated in this study.

Move 1 Step 4

"Although widely discussed in mass media and popular writings, there is a lack of a well-established psychological scale to measure this crisis in Indonesia." (Abstract 4, Journal of Educational. Health, Community Psychology (SINTA 2))

This is an example of a sentence which emphasizes on the research gap. This is the second sentence in the abstract. The first sentence can be considered as move 1 step 1. After the first sentence, the abstract directly underscores the fact that there is still a gap that needs to be filled. The expression "there is a lack of …" clearly shows this communicative function.

Move 2 Step 1

"This study aimed to investigate problems faced by EFL students in writing an argumentative essay and to explain their strategies to overcome the problems." (Abstract 4, Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (SINTA 2))

The second move which deals with stating the purpose of the research can clearly be seen from the example sentence above. This is the second sentence in the abstract. The first sentence can be classified under move 1 step 2 which makes a generalization about the difficulties in argumentative writing. After this generalization, the abstract continues by explicitly stating the purpose of the current research by using the key expression "The study aimed to …"

Move 3 Step 1

"A total of 24 SMAK BPPK grade 12 high school students in Bandung were divided into two matching groups (experimental group and control group) based on pretest scores measured by the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire." (Article 1, Gajah Mada Journal of Professional Psychology (SINTA 3))

Based on the sentence above, it is obvious that this is part of move 3 step 1 which focuses on describing the source of data or the participants. It is apparent how many

participants are included in this research and how they are grouped. This is the third sentence in the abstract. The first two sentences are part of moves 1 and 2.

Move 3 Step 3

"Pretest and posttest scores data were analyzed using the related samples t-test." (Article 1, Gajah Mada Journal of Professional Psychology (SINTA 3))

The next sentence from the same abstract as before is an example of move 3 step 3 which describes the procedure for the data analysis. In this case, the data is analyzed quantitatively using samples t-test. In other words, after move 3 step 1 which describes the source of data, it is followed by a brief description of how said data is going to be analyzed.

Move 4 Step 1

"The intervention results showed a significant increase in global self-esteem scores, as well as changes in stress, anxiety, and depression levels." (Abstract 3, Journal of Educational. Health, Community Psychology (SINTA 2))

In move 4 step 1, the findings and results of the study are explicitly stated in the abstracts. This is usually found towards the end of an abstract. In this case, this is actually the

final sentence. In other words, this abstract ends with move 4 and does not employ move 5. It is also found that this step can be realized in more than one sentence, sometimes even up to three sentences in an abstract.

Move 5 Step 1

"This suggests that more than half of the respondents are fairly autonomous in completing out their activities, while the rest are dependent on GT." (Abstract 3, Eternal - English Teaching Journal (SINTA 3))

The sentence above is an example of move 5 step 1 which is concerned with interpreting the findings or the results of the study. This sentence comes right after several sentences that describe the findings, which were presented in statistics. After presenting the numbers, the authors try to provide an interpretation of the results with this statement.

Move 5 Step 4

"Further research examining the impact of GT on nursing students' English achievement is needed to better understand the phenomenon." (Abstract 3, Eternal - English Teaching Journal (SINTA 3))

The next sentence from the same abstract is the final sentence of the abstract. It ends with move 5 step 4 which is the recommendation given by the authors. In this case, the writers recommends that further studies are conducted on this matter to provide a better understanding of the topic overall.

Next, in order to answer the first research question which deals with the rhetorical moves that are found in the abstracts from the applied linguistics and psychology journals, Table 2 below summarizes the findings.

Table 1

Distribution of the Rhetorical Moves in the Abstracts from All Four Journals

Move	Applied Linguistics			Psychology		
	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Category
Introduction (M1)	9	90%	Conventional	9	90%	Conventional
Purpose (M2)	9	90%	Conventional	10	100%	Obligatory
Method (M3)	10	100%	Obligatory	9	90%	Conventional
Product (M4)	10	100%	Obligatory	10	100%	Obligatory
Conclusion (M5)	5	50%	Optional	5	50%	Optional

From Table 2 above, it can be seen that the two groups share some similarities and differences. For example, the abstracts from both groups mostly employed the first move (90%), which can be considered as conventional, and they also utilized move 5 the least with only 50% of the abstract employing this move. Seeing as it is below 60%, this move can be considered as optional. Nonetheless, there is also a slight difference between the two groups, namely that the abstracts from the applied linguistics field considered M3 to be the obligatory move, whereas as the abstracts from the psychology field deemed M2 to be the obligatory one.

As for the answer to the second research question, the table below summarizes the findings regarding the patterns of the rhetorical moves found in the abstracts.

Table 2

Rhetorical Moves Patterns in the Abstracts from All Four Journals

No.	Journal	Move Pattern (M)	Frequency	Percentage
1		1-2-3-4-5	4	40%
2	Applied Linguistics	1-2-3-4	4	40%
3		2-3-4	1	10%
4		1-3-4-5	1	10%
5		1-2-3-4-5	4	40%
6	Psychology	1-2-3-4	4	40%
7		2-3-4	1	10%
8		1-2-4-5	1	10%

As can be seen from Table 3 above, the rhetorical move patterns are quite similar between the two groups. For instance, both groups have 4 abstracts that employed all five moves chronologically, i.e., from move 1 until move 5. There are also 4 abstracts from each group that only utilized 4 out of the 5 moves proposed by Hyland (2000). One difference that can be seen is that in the applied linguistics group, there is one abstract that uses the pattern M1-M3-M4-M5, which means that it is missing the statement related to the purpose of the study. On the other hand, the psychology group has a pattern of M1-M2-M4-M5, which shows that they are missing the move related to the methodology.

Discussion

In terms of the rhetorical moves that can be found in the abstracts of the applied linguistics and psychology journals, it is found that they are quite similar. In other words, the abstracts from both groups employed more or less similar rhetorical moves. For example, both groups considered M4 to be obligatory and described the findings of the studies explicitly in all of the abstracts. This is in line with the findings of the research by Hakim, Arsyad & Syahrial (2021) where M4 was also found to be an obligatory move, especially in applied linguistics research article abstracts. Nonetheless, the findings of the current study are slightly different from the findings of the study by Herlyna et al. (2024), where it was found that the Introduction move was an obligatory one. In this study, it is considered as conventional in both the applied linguistics and psychology abstracts.

As for the patterns of the rhetorical moves, it is also quite similar between these two groups in the sense that a lot of the abstracts from both groups utilized either all moves sequentially (from move 1 until move 5) or the first 4 moves in order. Whereas patterns such as M2-M3-M4 are not very common and only occurred in one abstract from each group. This finding is quite similar to the result of the study from Soy, Arsyad & Syafryadin (2023) in which this pattern is also not as common as other patterns such as M1-M2-M3-M4. Additionally, similar to the findings from the study by Obeng et al. (2023), the pattern which involves all five moves are quite common, especially in soft science such as applied linguistics and psychology.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the findings of the current study, it can be concluded that abstracts from the applied linguistics and psychology fields employ more or less similar rhetorical moves. This is probably due to the fact that they both belong to the soft science field. Hence, the differences between them are not that obvious as they probably both share similar conventions in writing abstracts.

Seeing as these abstracts are taken from reputable journals since they are all SINTA accredited rank 2 and 3, it is suggested that Indonesian writers employ similar rhetorical moves when writing the abstract for their research. Lastly, considering that this study only used a small number of abstracts, it is suggested that future studies include a larger body of corpus and try to compare other fields of science besides the two under study.

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