English for Specific Purposes 40 (2015) 27–41

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

English for Specific Purposes

journal homepage: http://ees.elsevier.com/esp/default.asp

Announcing one's work in PhD theses in computer science: A comparison of Move 3 in literature reviews written in English L1, English L2 and Spanish L1

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available online 12 August 2015

Keywords:
PhD thesis
Computer science
Literature review
Rhetorical variation
Self-mention
Self-promotion

ABSTRACT

In this paper I explore cross-linguistic rhetorical variation in the Literature Review chapters of 30 computer science doctoral theses written by English L1 (EngL1), Spanish L1 (SpaL1) and English L2 (EngL2) writers. Using Kwan's (2006) genre-analytical framework (Move 1: Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research; Move 2: Creating a niche; Move 3: Occupying the research niche), I particularly examine how writers present their research in Move 3 (M3). The results show the functional importance of M3 strategies in the computer science PhD thesis Literature Reviews. The texts in English present a higher number of occurrences and a wider range of M3 strategies than the SpaL1 texts. However, the SpaL1 texts are more homogeneous in terms of rhetorical distribution. Variation is also found in the linguistic mechanisms that the writers of the three groups use to make themselves visible and promote their work. National writing styles, discipline conventions and language barriers to effective interpersonal communication seem to have an influence on these writers. EAP courses and specific genre-based writing instruction could help junior scholars to successfully manage M3 strategies.

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1. Introduction

New knowledge and scientific advances are mainly communicated in English as a result of globalisation and the use of English as the *lingua franca* of academia. This has encouraged many studies to explore the textual organisation of research articles (RAs) in different disciplines written in English (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Brett, 1994; Holmes, 2001; Kwan, Chan, & Lam, 2012; Lewin & Fine, 1996; Lewin, Fine, & Young, 2001; Samraj, 2002; Soler-Monreal & Gil-Salom, 2010; Swales, 1990). The findings have contributed to the understanding of the nature and practice of the most widely used academic genre for the transmission of knowledge. Rhetorical models have been proposed for the RA sections and have been extensively applied to other written academic genres, such as dissertations and PhD theses. A widespread framework of analysis has been Swales' (1990) CARS model, consisting of Move 1 (Establishing a territory), Move 2 (Establishing a niche) and Move 3 (Occupying the niche).

Based on the English generic conventions, researchers have also compared the rhetorical choices of texts written in English with those of other languages so as to identify cultural influences on writing tendencies (Mauranen, 1993). To mention but a

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2015.07.004
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few, some authors have undertaken contrastive analyses of English and Eastern European languages (see Duszak, 1997). In other related work, Hirano (2009) compared RA introductions in English and Brazilian Portuguese, Loi (2010) compared RA introductions in English and Chinese, and Martín-Martín (2003), Perales-Escudero and Swales (2011) and Martín and León Pérez (2014) focused on the similarities and differences in move structures between academic texts written in English and in Spanish. Martín-Martín applied Swales' CARS model to a corpus of RA abstracts in social sciences. He found that Move 2 was used less frequently in the introduction section of the RA abstracts in Spanish than in the English RA abstracts and explained that the members of the international and the Spanish scientific communities have different expectations. Martín & León Pérez's (2014) study on the realisation of Move 3 in RA introductions in health and social sciences showed that the differences in how Spanish and English writers promote their research were attributable to both national cultural variables and disciplinary conventions.

To a lesser extent research has also been conducted on doctoral writing. Organisational patterns of PhD theses in different disciplines written in English have been studied. For instance, Bunton analysed the introduction (Bunton, 2002) and the conclusion chapters (Bunton, 2005) of PhD theses in 10 disciplines, but principally chemistry, ecology and biodiversity. Lim (2014) and Lim, Loi, and Hashim (2014) examined the introductions of a corpus of dissertations in applied linguistics. The rhetorical strategies of literature review chapters have been described by Kwan (2006), who focused on applied linguistics; Thompson (2009), who investigated agricultural botany, agricultural economics, food science and technology, and psychology; and Ridley (2011), who analysed eight disciplines in the hard and soft sciences. As for comparative research, Ono (2012) compared Japanese and English introductory chapters of literature PhD theses. He identified more steps in the English introductions than in the Japanese ones. He also found that the Japanese group put more emphasis on Move 2 than did the English group. However, in a study by Soler-Monreal, Carbonell-Olivares, and Gil-Salom (2011) on PhD thesis introductions in computer science written in English and in Spanish, it was concluded that Move 2 was obligatory in the English texts, but not in the Spanish ones. This suggests the existence of both disciplinary and language-specific variations in rhetorical features of the PhD genre.

Another branch of research has examined cross-cultural variation among writers of English L1 and L2 (Dong, 1996; Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008; Flowerdew, 1999; Hanauer & Englander, 2011; Mansourizadeh & Ahmad, 2011; Yayli, 2011). Comparative studies of rhetorical aspects of English L1, English L2 and Spanish L1 RA introductions in applied linguistics (Burgess, 2002; Sheldon, 2011) confirmed that all the texts followed Swales' move-step model in RA introductions, although some rhetorical differences were found among the groups. Burgess found that Spanish writers tended to exclude Move 2 and to either exclude or introduce Move 3 abruptly and with a single sentence or clause after the extended treatment of Move 1, often revealing an unstable relationship with the audience. Sheldon, however, found that all groups employed Move 3 and with more information compared to Burgess's study, probably because of the time that had elapsed between both studies and the increasing pressure on Spanish writers to publish in English international publications. She also found that although the Spanish L1 RA introductions showed a movement towards the conventions of the English register, the English L2 texts did not show a strong resemblance to the discourse conventions in English in regards to Moves 2 and 3 (Sheldon, 2011: 247). However, it remains to be seen whether these differences are valid for other academic genres. This paper contributes to the study of academic discourse from a cross-linguistic (English L1, English L2 and Spanish L1) perspective on the rhetorical strategies used in a corpus of PhD theses. While rhetorical variation in English and Spanish has been investigated mainly in the fields of applied linguistics, social sciences and health sciences, it is underrepresented in other disciplines. Further comparative rhetorical studies of academic genres written in English and Spanish may reveal variations in specific disciplines.

Research on the discipline of computer science has analysed structural and lexico-grammatical aspects of RAs written in English (Anthony, 1999; Harwood, 2005; Posteguillo; 1999; Shehzad, 2007a, 2008, 2010, 2011; Soler-Monreal & Gil-Salom, 2010). Among these analyses are comparisons of the rhetorical organisation of a corpus of computer science thesis introductions written in English and in Spanish (Carbonell-Olivares, Gil-Salom & Soler-Monreal, 2009; Soler-Monreal et al., 2011). According to these studies, Move 2 is not always used in the Spanish texts. Further, the thesis introductions in English are more complex rhetorically and use a wider range of strategies than the texts in Spanish, especially in Moves 2 and 3. But, to my knowledge, there is no comparative study of theses in computer science written by English-speaking students, Spanish-speaking students writing their PhD theses in Spanish and Spanish-speaking students writing their PhD theses in English. My aim is to add to the understanding of the rhetorical strategies applied in PhD theses of computer science across English-language and Spanish-language contexts by specifically focusing on the literature review chapter.

Literature reviews (LR) allow the writer to show her/his knowledge in an area of research and place her/his work on a research topic within the appropriate social and disciplinary context. In the majority of theses, they are either single or recurrent separate chapters, depending on the complexity of the topic, or part of other chapters, usually introductions (Ridley, 2011; Thompson, 2009). As Thompson (2009: 52) argues, LRs typically summarise the findings of related studies and establish gaps or weaknesses in present knowledge, paving the way for new knowledge claims. Thus, the rhetorical organisation of distinct LR chapters tends to follow the CARS model (Swales, 1990) for introductions. Once the thesis writer has established the setting for the research (Move 1), she/he creates a research space because related research is challenged or a knowledge gap or limitation is acknowledged (Move 2). This allows her/him to present the current study to the thesis examiners as one link in a chain of research that is developing and enlarging knowledge in the field, thus justifying the thesis research and consolidating the writer's research space (Move 3). However, in her study on the LR chapters of PhD theses on applied linguistics written in English, Kwan (2006) concluded that Move 3 is optional. It remains to be seen whether Kwan's findings are valid for other disciplines and for other languages.

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