

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Journal of English for Academic Purposes

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jeap

A comparison of U.S.-based and Iraqi English research article abstracts using corpora

Eric Friginal ^{a,*}, Sabah Slebi Mustafa ^b^a College of Arts and Sciences, Georgia State University, Office of the Dean, 25 Park Place, 25th Floor, Rm. 2543, United States^b College of Languages, University of Baghdad, Iraq

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 May 2016

Received in revised form 30 September 2016

Accepted 8 November 2016

Available online 12 November 2016

Keywords:

RA abstracts

Multi-dimensional analysis

Corpus linguistics

English for academic purposes

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the linguistic characteristics of English research article (RA) abstracts published in the United States (U.S.) and those published in Iraq, written by Iraqi authors. Because of their brevity, well-established purpose, and explicit format requirements, RA abstracts are ideal for genre-based studies (Hyland, 2004; Swales & Feak, 2009a) and cross-linguistic analyses. Eight parallel sub-corpora were used in this study, comprised of RA abstracts in four disciplines (Agriculture, Nursing, Engineering, and Languages) from the U.S. and Iraq. Overall, the texts collected in the eight corpora were written during the period from 1995 to 2016 across a wide-range of publications and research approaches. This study follows Biber's (1988, 1995) multi-dimensional analytical (MDA) approach in comparing and contrasting these U.S.-based and Iraqi RA abstracts. Specifically, extracted dimensions of academic writing from Hardy and Römer's (2013) MDA of NS and NNS upper-level academic written texts from the Michigan Corpus of Upper-Level Student Papers (MICUSP) are utilized as primary points of comparison. Results suggest similarities and interesting differences in how U.S.-based and Iraqi writers structure their abstracts, specifically in (1) how information is packaged and shared, (2) the expression of procedural discourse in abstract writing, and (3) how directness and argumentation are articulated by writers.

Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction

The publication of research articles (RAs) across disciplines is an important requirement for success in academia, especially for university-level researchers and instructors. This phenomenon has also increased in several global settings where international publications have become prerequisites for retention, promotions, or salary increases. Hence, peer-reviewed journals under reputable publishers in the United States (U.S.), the United Kingdom (U.K.), and similar counties and territories (e.g., Canada, Australia, Hong Kong), and those edited by recognized experts in the disciplines, continue to attract a large number of submissions from academics all over the world. Subsequently, there has been an upsurge in the number of 'pay-to-publish' venues, typically catering to international scholars outside the U.S. and the U.K. This 'progress' in global publishing has necessitated the increased production and sharing of research studies, addressing the needs of a wider, more diverse audience.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: efriginal@gsu.edu (E. Friginal), ss_alrawi2000@yahoo.com (S.S. Mustafa).

Current research in academia draws heavily on the immediate transfer and dissemination of data, methodologies and approaches, and results that are made possible by easy access to online journals and databases. These sites serve as the primary sources of information for literature reviews, establishing research gaps, and meta-analyses across settings and contexts. International scholars are able to keep abreast with the contemporary status of work conducted in their areas of specialization and updated syntheses of findings are immediately shared globally (Cilveti & Perez, 2006). However, this rapid increase in scholarly activity and the immediate publication of a wide-range of studies produce many interrelated challenges especially for international researchers (or scholars outside of institutions in the U.S., U.K., and similar countries). With English being the dominant language and the primary medium of publication for the majority of academic or scientific research papers (Eggington, 2004; Laborde, 2011; Swales, 1985), language use and the structuring or formatting of research articles are expected to conform to international, very competitive standards.

Swales and Feak (2009b) note that there are “several million research papers published every day” (p.1), taking into account various forms of academic written outputs from research-oriented technical reports, interactive posters, and reviews. This figure also includes papers from countries such as Iraq, where recent reforms in higher education require the faculty’s active participation and commitment (Mustafa, 2015). In Iraq, the production of research articles published in local universities has also become a regular component of life in academia and the scientific community. Research productivity (including focus on prestige) is, in part, measured by the potential global circulation of Iraqi studies, presently more dominant in the form of written genres, written in English (or translated in English from Arabic), that follow strict writing conventions and expectations. Numerous attempts at international publications, which also translate to numerous failures or rejections, are commonly experienced by faculty-researchers. In recent years, research mentoring programs and collaborations between Iraqi scholars and researchers based in universities such as those in the U.S. have been funded by local and international grants.

2. Linguistic analysis of RAs

The past three decades have seen a notable expansion of linguistic and variationist research, especially in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), in exploring and examining academic written registers, including published English RAs (Biber, 1995; Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1998; Gray, 2011, 2013). The various foci of these studies include the textual and structural organization of different RAs across disciplines, the linguistic characteristics of major components (e.g., methods, results, conclusion), and descriptions of RA abstracts across disciplines and publication types. These studies have pedagogical applications directly related to writing instruction and production of teaching materials, especially intended for second language (L2) writers. Book-length treatments of these topics include “Write Like a Chemist” by Robinson, Stoller, Costanza-Robinson, & Jones (2008), “Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills” (2009a) and “Abstracts and the Writing of Abstracts” (2009b) by Swales and Feak, and Gray (2015) “Linguistic Variation in Research Articles: When Discipline Tells Only Part of the Story,” to name only a few.

The studies of RAs have increasingly relied on corpora and corpus-based approaches. Online databases such as Davies (2014) Corpus of Contemporary American English (see, <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>) and general corpora of British and American English texts (e.g., the British National Corpus and the American National Corpus) have collections of academic texts which include research articles compiled across a range of disciplines. Word-level and structural comparisons (e.g., formulaic sequences and lexical bundles), cross-linguistic studies, and content analyses are only some examples of corpus-based approaches utilized in further analyzing RAs as a sub-register of professional, academic writing. Studies of discipline-specific RA texts in forestry (Friginal, 2013); legal writing (Gozdz-Roszkowski, 2011); and Biology, History, Chemistry (Cortes, 2004; Gray, 2013) provide interesting models in how to analyze the discourse of RAs using quantitative, frequency-based approaches.

Due to their brevity, well-established purpose, and explicit format requirements, RA abstracts are ideal for genre-based studies (Hyland, 2004; Swales & Feak, 2009a) and cross-linguistic analyses. Since the 1990s, and with the advent of computer-based techniques, abstracts have been increasingly compared across disciplines (see for example studies by Salager-Meyer, 1992; Huckin, 2001; Samraj, 2002, 2005; Lindeberg, 2004; Lores, 2004) and first language backgrounds of writers (e.g., Jones, 1992; Ventola, 1994). Studies conducted by Salager-Meyer (1992) and Nwogu (1990) focused on structural comparisons of abstracts in the medical sciences by examining discourse organization and textual transitions. Santos (1996) highlighted the textual organization of research paper abstracts in applied linguistics, while Breeze (2009) looked at issues of persuasion in academic law abstracts. Other studies of abstracts include a consideration of multiple disciplines in order to show variation due to genre norms and disciplinary preferences (e.g., Golebiowski, 2009; Pho, 2008; Samraj, 2002, 2005; Stotesbury, 2003).

Although they examined abstracts submitted to the TESOL Convention, a large international conference of ESL/EFL practitioners with a very competitive reviewing process, Halleck and Connor (2006) focused on the identification of “rhetorical moves” in TESOL proposals and they compared the distributions of these moves in proposals of three different subgenres (Research, Pedagogical and Administrative) and those that were successfully accepted and rejected. The rhetorical moves of TESOL abstracts were: territory, gap, goal, means, reporting previous research, outcomes, benefits, competence claim, and importance claim. Halleck and Connor found certain combinations of moves in all of their three subgenres and also reported that “variation in the sequencing of these moves depended not only on the specific audience but also on writers’ individual style” (p. 70). The study suggests that linguistic patterns (through rhetorical moves) may support proposal writers for future conferences as they attend to aspects of form, content and audience. There are clear parallels between this study

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4939238>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4939238>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)