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Strengthening move analysis methodology towards bridging the function-form gap

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ABSTRACT

Move analysis is a text analytical approach first developed by John Swales (1981) to investigate the underlying generic structure of research articles (RAs) in terms of moves-and-steps for pedagogical purposes. A widely shared aspiration of move analysts has been to identify the linguistic features characterizing the various RA moves not only in English, but also across languages. One shortcoming blocking this advancement is the lack of multilingual corpora fully annotated for their specific communicative functions in a co-ordinated and reliable manner. In this paper, we describe and discuss a methodology for analysing the various RA sections for their generic structure up from the step level in two languages and across a wide range of disciplines, using the discussion section as a test case for illustrating that methodology. Among the topics treated are establishing criteria for choosing a suitable sample of comparable RA discussions across the two languages, designing a model for annotating the section's moves and steps, creating an accessible computer-assisted coding scheme, achieving good levels of inter-rater reliability, and obtaining validation from expert informants and writers. In essence, this is a methodology paper offered as a working model for other EAP researchers undertaking similar analyses in future.

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1. Introduction

Move analysis is a text analytical method developed by Swales in 1981 as an essential component of his genre analytical framework (1990). In his approach, moves are "discoursal or rhetorical units performing coherent communicative functions in texts", whose linguistic realizations may be very variable in length and in other ways (Swales, 2004: 228–229). Steps, on the other hand, are the multiple text fragments that "together, or in some combination, realize the move" in such a way that "the steps of a move primarily function to achieve the purpose of the move to which it belongs" (Biber, Connor, & Upton, 2007: 24). Moves and steps mainly differ in that interpretation of a given text fragment at the step level is usually articulated in more specific terms (e.g. 'indicating a gap') than at the move level (e.g. 'establishing a niche').

Swales' original motivation for developing this text analytical scheme was to help advanced students for whom English is not their first language to improve their reading and writing of RAs in English. Many researchers have applied versions of this method of analysis in order to uncover the underlying generic structure of not only RA sections but also many other academic,

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professional and general genres (see a review in Biber et al., 2007). A major aim of these move analysts has been the identification of the linguistic features characterizing the various RA rhetorical moves (e.g. Cortes, 2013; Cotos, Haufman, & Link, 2017; Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Le & Harrington, 2015; Swales, 1981), often for pedagogic purposes. We refer to this research gap as 'the function-form gap'. From our applied genre perspective, filling this gap involves establishing the most salient types of text items, or patterns, occurring in a specific rhetorical context in an RA, or any other genre, that may lead a competent reader to interpret a given communicative function in a highly predictable manner. This goal is applicable to all text fragments realising a relevant communicative function except, of course, when the function is not signalled by any specialised text item, or pattern, as is the case of implicit, or inferred, causal logical functions (see Moreno, 2003a: 119, 138).

The data shown in recent studies of RA generic structure (e.g. Amnuai & Wannaruk, 2013; Cotos et al., 2017; Yang & Allison, 2003: 381–383) clearly suggest that the step is a more appropriate level for investigating the function-form gap than is the move. However, the field has still some way to go in this respect, especially in languages other than English, due to the paucity of large-scale corpora of RAs reliably annotated at the step level (cf. Cotos et al., 2017; Del Saz Rubio, 2011), and this despite all the technological advances now available (e.g. Anthony, 2003). Furthermore, it still remains unclear which is the minimal formal unit for annotating moves-and-steps (cf. a proposition, in Connor & Mauranen, 1999; the sentence for moves and the phrase (or clause) for steps, in Cotos, Huffman, & Link, 2015, 2016; or a sentence or paragraph, in Crookes, 1986), and whether functional interpretation best proceeds top-down or bottom-up. In this context, a group of experienced EAP researchers drawn from a number of Spanish universities was set up in 2010 as the ENEIDA[1] Team. One of their goals was to annotate a large sample of RAs reliably, giving priority to the identification of steps as functional coding units. So far, the team have proposed working move-and-step schemes for all the empirical research articles (ERA) sections in a wide range of disciplines and two languages.

The major aim of this paper is to reflect on the challenges faced by the ENEIDA annotators, or coders (see acknowledgments), in developing such move-and-step schemes for annotating ERAs at the step level as well as on the solutions adopted to improve reliability and validity. In the next section, we comment on the evolution of the move-and-step concepts, briefly introduce the aims of the ENEIDA Project followed by relevant results obtained so far, and explain why we choose to use the Discussion section to illustrate the kind of challenges faced in the process of annotation.

2. Move analysis and the ENEIDA project

2.1. Move analysis

By the time of *Genre Analysis* (Swales, 1990), several things were becoming clearer about move analysis, if they were not yet explicitly stated. First, a move was a rhetorical construct, the linguistic realization of which could be as short as a clause and as long as a paragraph (and/or sometimes repeated in cycles). Second, the function of a move was realised by the presence of one or more specific functions, or steps (Swales, 1990: 141). Third, the identification of move boundaries (i.e. the text items signalling the beginning of a move, or the transition from one move to the next; see also Paltridge, 1994: 296) could be uncertain, but was aided by a combination of bottom-up search for lexical or syntactic signals and a top-down close reading of the text for topic breaks or shifts in content. Fourth, there was a place for specialist disciplinary experts to verify the analysts' interpretations, given their deeper knowledge of the text subject matter and their stronger intuitions regarding the typical rhetorical structure and language used in good papers in their fields (e.g. Tarone, Dwyer, Gillette, & Icke, 1981). More recently, triangulation has typically involved interviews (sometimes text-based) with various participants, very often authors, but also including editors, reviewers and expert disciplinary writers (e.g. Hyland, 2012). Fifth, following Crookes (1986), there might be a place for additional analysts (or raters) who could confirm the findings of a primary investigator, their required training being open to question.

A challenge to these emerging procedures was provided by Paltridge (1994). He concludes that "Hasan, Bhatia, Swales, and Crookes, thus, all draw essentially on categories based on *content* to determine textual boundaries, rather than on the way the content is expressed *linguistically*" (original emphases) (Paltridge, 1994: 295). However, he does not discuss instances where linguistic features can indeed be seen by the reader as signalling a rhetorical shift, as with adversatives plus negative or quasi-negative language to signal a research gap (Swales, 2004: 229). More recently, Pho (2008) also questioned the standard combined procedures (e.g. Swales, 1990; Kanoksilapatham, 2005), arguing that identification of moves based on bottom-up linguistic signals and top-down content analysis leads to a certain circularity of reasoning. However, relating both kinds of evidence is a key element in hermeneutic methods, which Geertz characterizes as "a dialectical tacking between parts which comprise the whole and the whole which motivates the parts, in such a way as to bring parts and the whole simultaneously into view" (Geertz, 1980: 103). A different perspective on a combined procedure can also be inferred from Flowerdew's (2002) reflection on the issue:

> Although I refer to identification of schematic structure as the first stage in genre analysis, this is an idealization for the purpose of exposition. In actual fact, various interrelated levels of analysis go on at the same time: identification of communicative purpose(s), schematic structure, grammatical features, lexical features, etc. (p. 95)

In general, it would seem that Flowerdew's approach is the one adopted, either overtly or covertly, in most move analyses (see also Bhatia, 2001; Nwogu, 1990). However, little information is typically provided about the identification processes

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