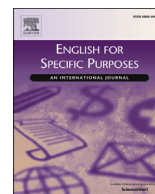




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Phraseology used to comment on results in the Discussion section of applied linguistics quantitative research articles



Thi Ngoc Phuong Le ^{a,b,*}, Michael Harrington ^b

^a Danang Department of Education and Training, 101 Ong Ich Duong Street, Danang City, Viet Nam

^b School of Languages and Cultures, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Qld, 4072, Australia

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents word clusters used to comment on results in the Discussion section of quantitative research articles in the field of applied linguistics. The corpus linguistic approach was adopted to identify clusters in 124 Discussion texts from leading applied linguistics journals. The identified clusters were then comprehensively analysed in context for their discourse functions. Next, the present study mapped the clusters onto an analytical framework termed the 'four-Step model', based on Yang and Allison's (2003) genre-based description of the *Commenting on results* Move. The study provided a detailed corpus linguistic account of how the clusters were used in specific Steps described in the model. A detailed description of the linguistic features, the internal structure (Move/Step cycles and embedding) and communicative functions of specific Steps in the *Commenting on results* Move were also presented based on the concordance analysis of the clusters. The findings further suggest that the use of specific clusters strongly manifests, and is conditioned by, the research article genre. The study has pedagogical implications for academic writing courses for students, especially for those from non-English language backgrounds.

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1. Introduction

Genre analysis, first proposed by Swales (1981) in his seminal work on the Introduction section of research articles, has become a powerful tool in text analysis because it provides insights into important characteristics of genres, including the organisational structure (known as 'Moves' and 'Steps') as well as linguistic features. A good number of genre-based studies have been conducted to explore features of different academic domains, such as application letters (Henry & Roseberry, 2001), editorial letters (Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 2002) and theses and dissertations (Nodoushan & Khakbaz, 2011). There is also a growing body of genre-based research into research articles (RAs), since they are considered to be the main channel of disseminating knowledge in most fields. These studies have investigated the rhetorical structure (how the writer organises their text to communicate its purpose) and/or linguistic features the writer uses to realise the communicative purpose.

Swales (1981) identified Moves in the RA Introduction, and provided words, expressions and linguistic features used to realise these Moves. Many other studies have investigated the use of linguistic features, including hedging devices (Salager-Meyer, 1994), tense (Malcolm, 1987) and reporting verbs (Thomas & Hawes, 1994). Recurrent word combinations, as part of a linguistic feature analysis, have also been explored in many RA studies with the employment of the corpus linguistic approach

* Corresponding author. Danang Department of Education and Training, 101 Ong Ich Duong Street, Danang City, Viet Nam. Tel.: +84 903 486 481.
E-mail addresses: phuong.le3@uq.net.au (T.N.P. Le), m.harrington@uq.edu.au (M. Harrington).

(e.g., Cortes, 2013; Gledhill, 2000a, 2000b; Marco, 2000; Saber, 2012). These studies have used different terms associated with word combinations, for example 'lexical bundles', 'clusters' and 'patterns'. They have however emphasised the importance of word combinations by showing that these sequences are prevalent in RAs and contain lexico-grammatical features that can reflect the discourse function of the studied genre.

Genre-based studies have benefited English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers and learners, as the findings have informed teaching materials and equipped students in different disciplines with techniques to achieve control over organisational patterning and linguistic realisation of texts in their own area of study and research. Nevertheless, findings that show the distribution of linguistic features and word combinations in particular Moves or Steps are needed since they will further benefit learners and material designers.

The objective of this paper is to identify word clusters in quantitative RA Discussions, and map them onto the Steps of the *Commenting on results* Move. The reason for the choice of the Discussion section for analysis is that this section plays a key role in quantitative RAs in the social and behavioural sciences. It is here the researcher presents to the reader the meaning of the quantitative findings, and shows how their study contributes to theory and practice in the discipline. As Swales himself observes, the Discussion section is particularly difficult to write for both native and non-native speakers of English (Swales & Feak, 2012). In the Discussion section, commenting on results is particularly important since it provides the means by which writers make new knowledge claims, which is a main goal of a research article (Basturkmen, 2009). Yang and Allison (2003) also argue that commenting on results expresses the main communicative purpose of the Discussion section. This study therefore focuses on commenting on results in the Discussion.

The discipline of choice is applied linguistics because this field is still practically under-researched as compared to some other scientific fields. In fact, only a small number of studies have investigated rhetorical structures and/or linguistic features of applied linguistics RAs (Basturkmen, 2009; Lim, 2010; Pho, 2008; Yang & Allison, 2003). Among these studies, only two (i.e., Basturkmen, 2009; Yang & Allison, 2003) have examined the Discussion section. However, they identified the rhetorical structure, but did not attempt to explore linguistic features associated with the organisation. From a pedagogical perspective, it is also important to show which linguistic features, especially word combinations, are used in specific Moves and Steps. Finally, it is still unclear whether word clusters vary across RAs that take different research methods (quantitative, qualitative or mixed). The present study only focuses on applied linguistics RAs that report quantitative results, and it is therefore the first step in the investigation into the use of phraseology in RAs adopting other research approaches.

This study has potential significance for genre-based research as it extends previous work and examines a corpus of writing from applied linguistics, specifically quantitative research reports. This area has heretofore attracted little attention from researchers. The study will contribute to and extend previous work on the Discussion section genre, particularly on the crucial *Commenting on results* Move. It will be among the first to examine linguistic use, particularly word combinations, in the domain, and the first to do this using a corpus linguistic analysis. The results obtained will potentially inform ESP instruction in academic writing. The following sub-sections will shed light on the main areas of interest in this study: phraseology, rhetorical structure and the link between them.

1.1. Phraseology

Phraseology refers to different types of word combinations, both fixed and variable (Hunston, 2002). Phraseology has been researched using two approaches: the traditional (also called 'phraseological') and the distributional approach (Granger & Paquot, 2008). While the former relies on semantic and syntactic criteria to include or exclude an item from the realm of phraseology, the latter employs a corpus-driven approach to identify a broad range of word combinations with a focus on the frequency of extracted items. Large numbers of studies have investigated phraseology in light of the distributional approach, but have referred to the sequences of words their analyses have uncovered in various ways: 'collocational frameworks' (Renouf & Sinclair, 1991), 'word clusters' (Saber, 2012; Scott & Tribble, 2006), 'lexical bundles' (Biber, Conrad, & Cortes, 2004; Cortes, 2013) and 'patterns' (Hunston & Francis, 2000).

The number and frequency of these word sequences has been calculated in various ways by different researchers. These methods of calculation include, but are not limited to, the threshold frequency of word combinations and the number of elements in multi-word units (Granger & Paquot, 2008). For example, Biber et al. (2004) set up a frequency cut-off level of 40 times per million words to extract lexical bundles in classroom and textbook registers. To further limit the scope of their study, they only considered four-word combinations. This suggests that it is necessary for this kind of research to give a clear explanation of criteria for extracting word combinations. The present study will present this information in Section 2.2.

Gledhill (2000a) clearly detailed the stages in which he identified collocations of salient grammatical items (e.g., *has, been, in, these, such, but*) and analysed their discourse functions in various sections of 150 pharmaceutical RAs. His study succeeded in drawing a link between the collocations and their discourse functions. For instance, he found that, in the Discussion section, *that* was used most frequently in complement *that*-clauses, and performed the function of evaluating or reformulating (explaining) results. However, Gledhill's study did not examine how these collocations were distributed in specific Moves/Steps of each section. Saber's (2012) study showed the distribution of salient phraseological patterns in specific Steps in different sections of 375 biomedical RAs. Saber found, for example, that the *Checking consistency with previous studies* Step in the Discussion section was realised by clusters: *in contrast to, our findings are consistent with, these findings are consistent with*. In a similar manner, Cortes (2013) identified lexical bundles in the RA Introductions of various disciplines. She further analysed these bundles structurally and functionally to link them to the Steps outlined in Swales's (1990, 2004) rhetorical

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