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# Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences

journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/kjss>

## Analysis of moves, rhetorical patterns and linguistic features in *New Scientist* articles

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 8 March 2016  
Received in revised form 3 August 2016  
Accepted 9 August 2016  
Available online xxxx

#### Keywords:

genre analysis,  
health and medical news reports,  
linguistic features,  
rhetorical moves

### ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the moves, rhetorical patterns based on Swales' genre analysis, and common linguistic features in health and medical science reports in the *New Scientist* journal. Twenty-four articles, one from each weekly issue, were randomly selected from the articles with a length between 350 and 600 words published online in *New Scientist* between July and December 2012. They were analyzed according to the content, categorized and coded with corresponding descriptions. The findings revealed seven obligatory and two optional moves. The key linguistic features common in the articles were modals and voice.

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### Introduction

Reading English scientific articles is one of the greatest challenges for non-native speakers of English, especially those studying at the graduate level. In Thailand, a considerable number of graduate students find reading English-written materials tough. They prefer reading texts in the Thai language though some graduate programs attempt to integrate English into activities such as lectures, project presentation, and reading discussion in the content area classes. This may be due to students' low English proficiency and unfamiliarity with English-written academic discourse such as science research articles which are structurally and lexically complicated. These students need support. Training them to read English research articles may be too advanced. It may be achievable if they start from a friendly version of research articles, but what types of text can these be? The researcher proposes science news reports. First, they cover stories about new experiments or discoveries in science based on research articles. It is, then, interesting to see if there are links between science news

articles and research articles. Second, the intended audience of science news articles is the general public, which implies that the messages conveyed to them are presented in a simpler language than that used by scientists to communicate in their community. Less complicated written articles could be a stepping stone for less English-proficient graduates to learn more about what people in their fields are working on. Unfortunately, not many studies have focused on science news reports. Since stories in the journal are based on scientific research presented in less intimidating format, as may be observed from their length, presumably, they may contain certain common, research-report characteristics, which may promote students' reading competence. This research aimed to fill the gap with an attempt to identify moves, their rhetorical patterns, and the language features frequently found in health and medical science reports in *New Scientist*, one of the most popular journals among different groups of readers.

### Literature Review

Genre analysis is an approach used to study the relationship between a particular type of the text and its

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Peer review under responsibility of Kasetsart University.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2018.03.006>

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Please cite this article in press as: Muangsamai, P., Analysis of moves, rhetorical patterns and linguistic features in *New Scientist* articles, *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2018.03.006>

context by dividing the text into small semantic units called moves. Each move has different communicative purposes that are shared among community members and this is reflected by the language use to serve specific functions. The combination of moves reveals structural patterns of the rhetorical discourse, and their sequence based on the author's communicative goals. Swales (1981, 1990) referred to 'genre' as 'a class of communicative event' in which its communicative purpose is shared by specific discourse community members. To gain insight into the text and its constituents, the way it is composed, interpreted and used, Swales employed genre analysis of the introduction section of each research article. From his study, he proposed the model Create a Research Space (CARS) as shown in Table 1.

Swales' research introduced how a text is structured and it has influenced several researchers to explore texts of different genres to gain insights into the flow of texts, their moves, and patterns. The model has been applied in several studies on parts of scientific journal research reports, for example, abstracts (Kenneth & Maclean, 1997; Tseng, 2011), introductions (Joseph, Lim, & Nor, 2014; Swales, 1981), results and discussion (Amnuai & Wannaruk, 2012; Yang & Allison, 2003); and full scientific journal research reports (Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Nwogu, 1997; Tseng, 2011). These studies have provided guidelines for those new to their target community and its common practices as seen in *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* by Swales and Feak (1994), which introduces international students from different disciplines to the characteristics of academic writing and to self-positioning in their field of study. The credibility of Swales' model and its practicality to pedagogy are the main reasons why this study was conducted within this framework.

Among research on several types of texts aforementioned, health and medical news reports have been scarcely explored. Nwogu (1997) and Fryer (2012) analyzed medical research articles. The findings of these studies showed similarities in four moves and taxonomical differences in classifying moves and steps. Nwogu (1991) examined 15 popularized science news articles from *New Scientist*, a popular science magazine, *Newsweek*, a general magazine, and *The Times*, a newspaper. Nine moves were found.

Unlike science research reports which disseminate scientists' works with complex content to their specialized circle, using technical terms and specialized language

(Melles, 2004), the health and medical news report conveys the essence of complex scientific content, but the way it is presented is less technical and more popularized, making it accessible by a wider audience (Schafer, 2011). Such characteristics could be beneficial for non-native English speakers, especially those not proficient in English and new to research.

However, Nwogu (1991) may not reflect the clear patterns of this genre because the number of articles was small and the data sources were from different science magazines and journals. Moreover, there was no account on the text length or distinct criteria for move categorization. These factors could obscure the findings. The current study, on the other hand, examines 24 health and medical news reports from one specific medium, *New Scientist* issues between January and July 2012, following Swales' model, to gain insight into moves of English texts, their patterns, and linguistic features in the hope that the findings could empower learners by preparing them linguistically and academically before being exposed to the real world of international expertise. This makes the health and medical news report a worthy subject for investigation. The research questions are:

1. What are the moves and their rhetorical patterns of health and medical news reports in *New Scientist*?
2. What are the linguistic features commonly found in *New Scientist* articles?

## Method

### Materials and Data Collection

*New Scientist* is a magazine and e-zine that publishes articles from different fields of science such as biotechnology, environment, and medicine. It reports recent experiments and discoveries based on full papers published in professional journals. In this study, twenty-four health and medical news articles issued between July and December 2012—one from each weekly issue—were retrieved from [www.newscientist.com](http://www.newscientist.com) and randomly selected on the basis of the text length of between 350 and 600 words.

### Data Analysis

The health and medical news reports were numbered, tabulated and analyzed within Swales' framework of genre analysis (1990). The researcher read each report and divided it into segments which were then marked as moves based on the content and given short descriptive names. The researcher reread the scientific news reports in order to ascertain whether there was any arbitrariness or overlaps among the moves. After revisions, alterations and modifications were made. Then they were classified into two types of moves: obligatory moves and optional ones based on the cut-off frequency of 60 percent occurrence as a measure of move stability (Kanoksilapatham, 2007). Subsequently, to determine the move structures, the researcher re-examined the moves of each article and recorded their sequence. For reliability, an expert in the field analyzed the articles and coded them separately. In comparison, the agreement rate

**Table 1**

CARS model for research article introductions by Swales

Move 1 Establishing a territory		
Step 1	Claiming centrality	and/or
Step 2	Making topic generalization(s)	and/or
Step 3	Reviewing items of previous research	
Move 2 Establishing a niche		
Step 1A	Counter-claiming	or
Step 1B	Indicating a gap	or
Step 1C	Question-raising	
Move 3 Occupying the niche		
Step 1A	Outlining purposes	or
Step 1B	Announcing present research	
Step 2	Announcing principal findings	
Step 3	Indicating article structure	

Source: Swales (1990, p. 141)

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