



Towards the Synergy of Genre- and Corpus-Based Approaches to Academic Writing Research and Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the research agenda of a framework that integrates corpus- and genre-based approaches to academic writing research and pedagogy. This framework posits two primary goals of academic writing pedagogy, that is, to help novice writers develop knowledge of the rhetorical functions characteristic of academic discourse and become proficient in making appropriate linguistic choices to materialize such functions. To these ends, research in this framework involves 1) compilation of corpora of academic writing annotated for rhetorical functions, 2) analysis of the organization and distribution of such functions, 3) analysis of the linguistic features associated with different functions, 4) development of computational tools to automate functional annotation, 5) use of the annotated corpora in academic writing pedagogy, and 6) exploration of the role of form-function mappings in academic writing assessment. The implications of this framework for promoting consistent attention to form-function mappings in academic writing research, pedagogy, and assessment are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Assessment, Computational Tools, Corpus Analysis, Form-Function Mappings, Genre Analysis, Genre Competence, Linguistic Features, Rhetorical Functions

INTRODUCTION

Decades of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing research have emphasized the “dynamic complexity of discursive practices” (Bhatia, 2015, p. 9) by highlighting the intentions and choices of writers, as well as the expectations of discourse community members. Such research has drawn on various methodological approaches but is particularly associated with rhetorical move-step analysis of writers’ communicative goals and corpus analysis of recurring patterns of linguistic features. A substantial portion of this research has focused on research article (RA) writing, in large part due to the increasing importance for scholars around the world to publish their research in English language academic journals (Curry & Lillis, 2004) and the understanding that the RA represents “a high stakes

DOI: 10.4018/IJCALLT.2021010104

game upon which hiring, promotion, and continued employment can depend” (Belcher, 2007, pp. 1-2) in the academic world.

EAP writing pedagogy is motivated by the complexity and significance of EAP research writing for novice and established scholars. The notion of *writing development* itself has expanded beyond formal knowledge of language (Polio, 2017) and/or rhetorical knowledge in isolation. Rather, developing genre competence for participation in disciplinary genre practices entails development and integration of rhetorical and formal knowledge dimensions (among others), as highlighted in Tardy’s (2009) multidimensional model of genre knowledge development. There have been calls for the “integration of genre analysis and corpus-based investigations” (Flowerdew, 2005, p. 5) in genre-based analysis of academic writing practices, and a number of scholars have begun to respond by implementing move-based genre analysis and corpus approaches (e.g., Cortes, 2013; Durrant & Mathews-Aydinli, 2011; Le & Harrington, 2015; Lim, 2010; Lu, Casal, & Liu, 2020; Omidian, Shahriari, & Siyanova-Chanturia, 2018; Yoon & Casal, 2020a).

However, research addressing the “function-form gap” (Moreno & Swales, 2018, p. 41) in large-scale, systematic ways is scarce in EAP writing scholarship. Furthermore, many extant integrated analyses privilege corpus-based approaches over move-step analysis by assigning move-step codes to decontextualized extracted features, perhaps due to the considerable time commitments involved in manual analysis (Flowerdew, 2005). This paper addresses this paucity by proposing and outlining a framework for EAP corpus-based genre analysis that covers corpus compilation; qualitative rhetorical and functional coding and annotation; corpus-based linguistic analysis and annotation; and integrated rhetorical-linguistic pedagogical and assessment applications.

ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES RESEARCH ON WRITING PRACTICES

EAP Writing Research in the “Social/Genre” Tradition

Tribble (2009, 2015) identified three approaches to EAP writing instruction: “Social/Genre”, “Intellectual/Rhetorical” and “Academic Literacies”. Much EAP writing research aligns with the Social/Genre approach, which is “situated within an English for Specific Purposes tradition” (Tribble, 2015, p. 442). Such research predominantly follows the rhetorical move analysis closely associated with the work of Swales (1990, 2004) and is valued for the emphasis placed on writers’ rhetorical choices in relation to their understanding of community expectations and conventionalized genre practices. In such analysis, a rhetorical move refers to a recurring, recognizable functional aim of a particular genre (e.g., establishing a research territory in RA introductions; Swales, 1990). Steps are the proposition-driven (Moreno & Swales, 2018) components that build a rhetorical move. Both moves and steps can be linguistically realized over chunks of variable length, so move analysis is often conducted with the rhetorical chunk as the unit of analysis. Rhetorical move frameworks are developed and applied through both bottom-up and top-down manual analysis of text that relies on linguistic cues, rhetorical markers, structural elements, and a variety of other signals of rhetorical intent. It often results in rhetorical move frameworks that describe both the range and consistency of rhetorical aims within a genre.

Swales’ (1990, 2004) (revised) Creating a Research Space model has been a highly productive framework for analyzing RA introductions (e.g., Hirano, 2009; Samraj, 2002) and literature reviews (e.g., Jian, 2010; Kwan, Chan, & Lam, 2012). Genre analysts have continued the Swalesean tradition by creating frameworks to account for the rhetorical structure of other main RA sections, including Cotos, Huffman, and Link’s (2017) Demonstrating Rigor and Credibility model for research methodologies and Yang and Allison’s (2003) unnamed framework for Results, Discussions, and Conclusion sections (see also Basturkmen, 2011; Bruce, 2009). Other scholars have conducted move-step analysis on other academic genres, such as conference abstracts (e.g., Samar, Talebzadeh, Kiany, & Akbari, 2014; Yoon & Casal, 2020b).

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