

RHETORICAL STRUCTURAL PATTERNS OF POSTGRADUATE THESES ABSTRACTS OF RELATED DISCIPLINES: A GENRE STUDY

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Abstract

The study of research abstracts has gained significant scholarly attention as part of genre studies due to the communicative importance of abstracts in constructing academic knowledge. This study contributes to the discussion by examining the structural organization and lexico-grammatical features of ninety (90) postgraduate theses abstracts in the disciplines of English Language studies, Literature studies, and Linguistics studies (Ghanaian Languages). The abstracts were purposively sampled from the graduate theses of departments of the School of Languages, the University of Ghana. The data was analyzed using Hyland's (2000) genre model of research abstracts. The findings reveal that abstracts of English Language studies and Linguistics studies (Ghanaian Languages) are often informative while Literature studies abstracts are more indicative and possess distinct structuring of the moves. The Purpose move (M2) remains obligatory and the Conclusion move (M5) is optional across the disciplines. Also, some lexico-grammatical features in the linguistic choices of scholars in the three disciplines point to evidential differences that mark informative abstracts as varying from indicative abstracts. The study concludes that identifying the discipline-specific function of the abstracts may be the best means to account for variations in abstracts of varying disciplines and calls for the deliberate enculturation of academics into discipline-oriented research writing skills to improve the presentation of research ideas in abstracts.

Keywords

abstracts, theses, genre, rhetorical moves, language study

1 Introduction

The mastery of academic discourses is essential for acceptance into academic communities and academic progression for scholars. Hence, there continues to be orientation, reproduction, and refining of the nature and the essentials of academic discourses to young scholars. Academic discourses can be construed as ways of thinking and using language in response to the dictates of academic institutions and the academy (cf. Hyland 2011, Khoutyz 2022). This may be reflected in social activities like educating students, demonstrating learning, disseminating ideas, and constructing knowledge (Hyland 2011). The term *academic discourse* has often been equated to academic language or the language of schooling which usually is a structural, system-based perspective of language;

however, the extension of the meaning of academic discourse to practices related to “the actual language users, their communicative tasks in particular social and institutional contexts, and the pre-patterned solutions to these tasks as part of a community’s stock of knowledge” (Heller & Morek 2015: 181) better captures the importance of academic discourses. In essence, academic discourse is embedded with institutional and institutionalized rules of academic communities but not free from personal knowledge constructed over some time. The thesis forms an important form of academic text that employs academic language and manifests several competencies of academic discourses. The thesis is a carefully constructed body of knowledge and information that presents a comprehensive thought on a particular topic of a discipline. In this highly competitive academic world, the thesis is an essential document that marks excellence in knowledge construction and is an important requirement for the completion of a graduate program. Compared to research articles, the thesis receives lesser scholarly attention as an academic discourse in the area of genre studies (cf. Bunton 2005, El-Dakhs 2018) and this may be so due to its volume. However, the few research works that have investigated this area of scholarship have produced significant insights. For instance, Bunton (2005), who studied the Conclusion chapters of PhD theses, argues that the generic structure of the Conclusion section of theses is significantly different from that of research article abstracts and that concluding chapters in theses may show disciplinary-motivated variations in length, structure and emphasis. The Results-Discussion chapters of postgraduate theses have also been found to consistently include Introducing the results and Reporting results moves across disciplines while variations may exist with Summarizing results and Commenting on results moves (Nguyen & Pramoolsook 2016). Although the rhetorical structuring of the Introductions of theses is organized from general information to specific information like research articles (Swales 2004), they may show variations and be presented as from a specific to a general flow of ideas and end with more specific information of the research work (Wasima & Abbas 2015) due to the length of theses.

The abstracts of theses are very important sections that often serve as a preview to the dissertation. They may mirror entirely how the dissertation is structured and also clarify some key concepts (Tibbo 1993). These features often make their information dense and structurally complex. They must be coherent syntactically and semantically (Pinto & Lancaster 1999). Given this, abstracts ought to be well-written and structured as their poor constructions have a direct impact on the understanding and recall of the argument of the dissertation. This research intends to highlight these important properties of the abstracts in postgraduate theses that have not received as much scholarly attention as those

of research articles. Moreover, the few scholarly works on these abstracts in literature or applied linguistics have argued the existence of variations in their structuring, and/or re-invention of rhetorical moves to suit writers' interests (Ebadi et al. 2019). The present research, therefore, probes these observations in the case of related disciplines in the area of language study. Essentially, it seeks to examine the move structures and some lexico-grammatical features employed in postgraduate theses in the related disciplines of English Language (EL) study, Literature (LI) study, and Linguistics studies in Ghanaian Languages (LGL) to determine their similarity and variations, and their conformity or otherwise to established structures of these abstract writing.

2 Literature review

Research abstracts are essential components of theses and research articles (RAs) because they help readers decide the relevance of a piece of research, and are instrumental in understanding the argument of research work. Their specific role is to summarize and present an overview of a thesis or a research article. Lorés (2004: 281) considers an abstract as “an abbreviated, accurate representation of the contents of a document, preferably prepared by its author(s) for publication with it”. They often provide language preparation for text through keywords, and they function as current awareness tools (Cross & Oppenheim 2006: 429).

Abstracts can be classified into three kinds based on their functions: informative, indicative, or informative-indicative. The informative abstract informs readers about the entire research paper by capturing the paper in a miniature form (Lorés 2004). Such abstracts characteristically present, systematically, exactly what is found in a research article (Piqué-Noguera 2012). Informative abstracts perform two essential functions: assessment of the research paper, and substitute for the research paper when cursory knowledge is needed (Cross & Oppenheim 2006). The indicative abstract, on the other hand, essentially allows readers to understand the scope and nature of a research work by indicating the subject and main argument of a research article (Lorés 2004). The indicative abstract often presents only a background and a purpose, but either the methodology, the results, or both, are normally omitted (cf. Cross & Oppenheim 2006, Piqué-Noguera 2012). The last type of abstract is the informative-indicative abstract whose function is to perform both the role to inform scholars of the entire research paper and also to indicate scholarship positions argued in the paper. These kinds of abstracts may be more detailed and are often lengthy as they seek to provide a comprehensive scholarly account of the structure and arguments of a research paper. These classifications suggest that the structuring of abstracts is strongly

linked with the function abstracts perform. This raises scholarly questions about the generic nature of abstracts as genre studies posit that some identifiable moves and structures define a text.

The studies of abstracts as genres have, therefore, often focused on the nature of abstracts across languages, across disciplines, and within disciplines. The study of abstracts across two or more languages has sought to understand the influence of the choice of language on the structuring and/or rhetorical features of abstracts and to underscore the existence or otherwise of variations in the conventional structuring of abstracts resulting from the different linguistic rules of languages (cf. Van Bonn & Swales 2007, Bouziane & Metkal 2020). Martín Martín (2003) highlights that though there are relative similarities in the structuring of abstracts of different languages, the rhetorical moves applied to scientific discourse abstracts are not universal. The point of departure may exist in the introduction section and the results sections which Martín Martín (2003) attributes to sociocultural factors of the discourse community. Accordingly, variations in language do not affect the general structuring although variations in linguistic features may exist (Van Bonn & Swales 2007). Furthermore, the variations in abstracts of writers of different language orientations have been attributed to socio-cultural differences in the ecology of the languages (Marefat & Mohammadzadeh 2013). Some sociocultural factors that bear some relevance to the language of the abstract include the nativeness or non-nativeness of the writers of the abstract in a specific language (Al-Khasawneh 2017).

Studies into abstracts of the same discipline suggest that the likelihood of differences in the structuring of moves and linguistic features of the abstracts is very minimal (Alyousef 2021, Bonsu & Afful 2022). Abstracts of the same discipline do not only share a similar organization of moves but may be characterized by a cluster of linguistic features that frequently co-exist (Kanoksilapatham 2013). Thus, the structuring of moves of abstracts of related disciplines often follows a linear order (Bonsu & Afful 2022) and the occurrence of differences have been associated with the culture or origins of the writers (Vathanalaotha & Tangkiengsirisin 2018). Vathanalaotha and Tangkiengsirisin (2018) argue that the few differences that occur in such abstracts can be assigned to writers' different nationalities and differences in their socialization practices of the discipline. These few differences do not often occur with the presentation of the move structures but with the linguistic elements.

Abstracts of unrelated disciplines have often been probed to understand the influence of disciplines on abstract features. The goal has been the identification of similarities and differences in the rhetorical structuring of abstracts that reflect disciplinary peculiarities or otherwise. Pho (2008) suggests that three

moves (presenting the research, summarizing the findings, and describing the methodology) are general in almost all the abstracts of all disciplines; however, what distinguishes a particular discipline's abstract from another is the combination of certain linguistic resources like the grammatical subjects, verb tense and voice. Ghanzanfari et al. (2016) and Galaidin (2021) confirm that although the move preferences may be similar, minimal differences that may exist in the use of discipline-related jargon. Other scholars (cf. Behnam 2014, Ebrahimi 2015), however, identify the presence of notable differences in the cross-disciplinary comparison of abstracts and point to the textual structure of the abstracts as the area of key differences which they ascribe to the academic discourse community and culture, especially among non-native writers. Also, some differences may be found in the expression of authority or self-mention, and the optional steps of the abstracts like the Introductions and the Conclusions (Ebrahimi 2015).

Generally, many scholars seem to associate the differences in linguistic features with the discourse communities' practices of the disciplines. It is intriguing, therefore, to understand how much of the differences will exist with abstracts of related disciplines with authors of similar origins and similar academic socialization in a more formal academic discourse like postgraduate theses abstracts, as this research seeks to highlight.

3 Method

3.1 Source of data

Postgraduate theses abstracts of two departments of the School of Languages at the University of Ghana form the corpus of this paper – specifically, the Department of English and the Department of Linguistics. The theses were selected because they indicate a higher level of research work and are supposed to reflect a greater conceptual understanding of academic discourses. A total of ninety (90) abstracts were purposefully selected for the study and they comprised thirty (30) from each of the disciplines involved: Literature studies (LI), English Language studies (EL), and Linguistics studies in Ghanaian Languages (LGL). Each group was made up of fifteen (15) Master's theses abstracts (MPhil) and fifteen (15) PhD theses abstracts to enable the generalization of findings as reflecting the practices of postgraduate scholars in the disciplines. All the writers of the theses were Ghanaians and can be regarded as having mastery over the use of the English language as English is the language of education, business, and social engagements in the country.

3.2 Analytical framework

The study employed Hyland's (2000) model of abstracts as the framework for analysis. Hyland's model identifies that abstracts are made of five functional moves which include Introduction (M1), Purpose (M2), Method (M3), Product (M4), and Conclusion (M5). This model is significant because it distinguishes the writer's purpose from the Introduction move arguing that an abstract's Purpose is distinct from its Introduction because the Purpose presents a justification or the exact aims of the research while the Introduction presents the background or context of the research. Hyland (2000) also employs the term *Product* instead of *Result* in the model to capture the fact that some abstracts may not necessarily present empirical results but rather present arguments that are also as significant as the results. Table 1 below presents a summary of Hyland's (2000) five-move model of abstracts.

Move	Description
Introduction	Establishes the context of the paper and motivates the research or discussion
Purpose	Indicates purpose, thesis, or hypothesis, outlines the intention behind the paper
Method	Provides information on design, procedures, assumptions, approach, data, etc.
Product	States the main findings or results, the argument, or what was accomplished
Conclusion	Interprets or extends results beyond the scope of the paper, draws inferences, points to applications or wider implications

Table 1: Moves structure of abstracts (Hyland 2000: 67)

The analysis of the moves concentrated on identifying the moves, determining the frequency of the moves, and establishing the sequencing of the moves. The study adopted the cognitive-semantic boundary criterion, as espoused by Afful and Gyasi (2020), to identify the moves in the abstracts. The frequency of a move determines the importance that is placed on the move. Hüttner's (2010) guidelines for determining the status of moves were used to determine the status of a move to the abstracts. By this criterion, a move was considered obligatory, core, ambiguous, or optional. The classification based on their observed frequency is presented in Table 2 below.

Percentage of occurrence	Status
90% - 100%	Obligatory
50% - 89%	Core
30% - 49%	Ambiguous
1% - 29%	Optional

Table 2: Hüttner's (2010) model of determining the status of moves

The study further explores the linguistic resources that are employed in the abstracts to achieve the communicative purposes of the writers. Of particular importance to this research were the lexico-grammatical features of sentence patterns, textual space, and authorial presence.

3.3 Data analysis

The study used a mixed method in the data analysis. This consisted of an analysis of the frequency of moves and some linguistic observations of the identified moves. Each of the selected abstracts was coded after the discipline for ease of reference. For example, LI abstracts were coded as MLit and PLit for Masters and PhD abstracts respectively; EL abstracts, as MLang and PLang for Masters and PhD abstracts respectively; and LGL abstracts, as MLing and PLing for Masters and PhD abstracts respectively. The moves identified were tagged as M1 for Introduction, M2 for Purpose, M3 for Method, M4 for Product, and M5 for Conclusion following the consecutive occurrence of the moves as stipulated by Hyland (2000). The analysis of the grammatical features followed an examination of the sentence patterns, textual space and authorial presence that occurred in the abstracts.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Frequency of moves

This section provides an account of the frequency of moves, based on Hyland’s (2000) model, which was observed in the data. All 90 abstracts included in the corpus were examined. The results of the frequency of the occurrence of the moves in the abstracts of the disciplines are presented in Table 3 below.

Moves	ELanguage	Literature	LinguisticsGL
M1	17 (56.7%)	27 (90.0%)	16 (53.3%)
M2	30 (100.0%)	30 (100.0%)	28 (93.3%)
M3	28 (93.3%)	23 (76.7%)	27 (90.0%)
M4	28 (93.3%)	20 (66.7%)	28 (93.3%)
M5	5 (16.7%)	3 (10.0%)	3 (10.0%)

Table 3: Frequency of moves in the abstracts

The findings in Table 3 indicate that there exist some variations and similarities in the preference of moves in the three related disciplines. Across the disciplines, the study revealed that the Purpose move (Move 2) is the most frequent. El-Dakhs (2018) has suggested that the Product move was the most important

in these abstracts, especially PhD theses abstracts; however, the observation made in this study contradicts that claim. The findings assert the position that the Purpose move is the most important and recurring move of postgraduate theses abstracts considering its importance in communicating the goal of the research in abstracts (Zand-Moghadam & Meihami 2016). What constitutes the second and third frequent moves in the abstracts varies according to the disciplines. EL and LGL abstracts have the Method (M3) and Product (M4) moves as the next frequent moves. However, the LI abstracts have the Introduction (M1) and Product (M4) moves as the next frequent moves. Earlier studies like Ren and Li's (2011) study of Master's theses of non-native users of English and El-Dakhs' (2018) study of PhD theses among native users of English, both confirmed M3 and M4 as part of the obligatory moves of postgraduate theses abstracts. The findings of this study, however, vary from such position because LI abstracts placed more emphasis on the Introduction move (M1). Indeed, Marefat and Mohammadzadeh (2013) observe that the Introduction move is indispensable in LI abstracts. It seems, therefore, that the variation is discipline-motivated. This is demonstrated in Table 4 below.

Moves	ELanguage	Literature	LinguisticsGL
M1	Core	Obligatory	Core
M2	Obligatory	Obligatory	Obligatory
M3	Obligatory	Core	Obligatory
M4	Obligatory	Core	Obligatory
M5	Optional	Optional	Optional

Table 4: Status of moves in the abstracts of various disciplines

The findings in Table 4 indicate that the preferences of the moves in the abstracts of LGL and EL studies are more akin. They both have M2, M3, and M4 as obligatory moves, M1 as a core move, and M5 as optional. This finding tells that EL and LGL scholars are more concerned about informing readers of their research work rather than drawing implications of their findings and also relating their works to establish background knowledge. This marks these abstracts as more informative. LI abstracts, on the contrary, have M1 and M2 as obligatory moves, M3 and M4 as core moves, and M5 as optional. They can be described as more indicative as they place more emphasis on the background and purpose of the arguments. These observations suggest that many differences exist in the structuring of the rhetorical moves of abstracts of even related disciplines.

4.2 Presentation of moves

Move 1 - Introduction

Swales (1990) posits that this move is used to make topic generalizations, reference or review previous research, or claim the centrality of the topic. The move is considered essential for abstracts because it provides the background of the research or establishes its context (Hyland 2000). The Introduction move has, however, been considered by some scholars as non-essential in abstracts. Indeed, Sidek et al. (2016: 29) argue that “providing the background of the study in the abstract is not necessary for readers to get the essence of their studies”. These varying positions seem to explain the variations in the use of this move in the abstracts observed.

The Introduction move is a core move but not obligatory in EL and LGL, 56.7 per cent and 53.3 per cent respectively. The disciplines seem to take the position of Sidek et al. (2016) regarding the move as not defining the essence of the study. The move was used in these disciplines to allude to previous studies without citing any specific authority or topic generalizations. See Examples (1) and (2):

- (1) *Studies on Ghanaian English pronunciation had generally used language groups from only Southern Ghana, concentrated on the linguistic variation with little or no regard to the social environment of participants involved, and used auditory analysis only. [PLang5]*
- (2) *A noun phrase is a phrase that behaves like a noun. The head of a noun phrase is technically the noun. In grammar, a noun phrase functions as subject and as object. The noun phrase is found in the grammar of all languages. [MLing4]*

Abstracts of LI studies made great use of the Introduction move (90.0%). The Introduction move in the abstracts was more inclined towards referencing previous studies with citations and making topic generalizations. These contextualized the arguments of the abstracts and captured the reader’s attention, for example:

- (3) *Highlife has several elements, poetry being one of these. Often musician displays highly imaginative and skillful manipulation of language. Unfortunately, most studies have emphasized only the socio-political and socio-cultural values to the neglect of the literary. Earlier scholars such as Bame (1981, 1991), Sutherland (1960) and others have restricted their study to sociological aspect by examining the content of the songs and not their stylistic features. [PLit6]*

As observed in Example (3), the author uses a combination of topic generalizations and references to previous research. This combination strengthens the persuasiveness of the Introduction move in LI abstracts and also displays the authors' familiarity with the relevant literature on the topic to demonstrate their disciplinary competence.

Move 2 - Purpose

The Purpose is often an obligatory component of theses abstracts (El-Dakhs 2018, Suwarni et al. 2021). This assertion is confirmed by this research as it is the most frequent move of all the disciplines' abstracts. According to Hyland (2000), the Purpose outlines the intention of the research by stating the aim or what the research intends to accomplish. The data revealed that in EL abstracts, the move is more likely to explicitly indicate the exact purpose of the work (21 times) than what the research does (5 times). Some abstracts may realize a combination of both functions, as in Example (4):

- (4) *The general aim of the study is to describe the request forms used by speakers of English in Ghana.* [PLang6]

In LI and LGL abstracts, the move is more often used to indicate what the research does, than to explicitly state the purpose of the work. Other abstracts combined both functions.

- (5) *This study explores fundamental relationship existing in the works of two great American scholars of the 19th century: Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson.* [MLit10]
- (6) *The study explores challenges teachers face in implementing the language-in education policy.* [PLing14]

Marefat and Mohammadzadeh (2013) argued that the Purpose move is rarely used in LI research article abstracts because it is less frequent than the Introduction and Method moves. This study, however, points out that this claim is not the same for LI theses abstracts as the move is rather predominant in the abstracts.

Move 3 - Method

This move presents information on the research design, procedures, assumption, approach, and data, among others that were used for the research (Hyland 2000: 67). This is often one of the obligatory moves of postgraduate theses abstracts (Zand-Moghadam & Meihami 2016, El-Dakhs 2018). The

Method move is essential to grasp the thrust of research abstracts (Pho 2008). Sidek et al. (2016: 29) claim that abstracts without the Method move are obscure because the move indexes the legitimacy of the findings of the research and its absence questions the findings presented in the abstract. It is no surprise, therefore, that this move has often been obligatory for many research abstracts although some researchers (Gil 2020) have found it otherwise.

This study found the Method move to be obligatory for EL and LGL abstracts. The move was often presented as information about the data, theory/assumption, procedure, and/or research design:

- (7) *The study employed a mixed method approach in examining political editorials of four newspapers (Daily Graphic, Ghanaian Times, Daily Guide, and The Chronicle) selected through a purposive sampling procedure. To confirm the statistical relevance of the distributions, the research conducted Chi square tests at Pearson's critical value of 0.05. [PLang4]*
- (8) *Data were selected using questionnaires from 1444 senior high school (2 & 3) students, carefully selected from 75 public schools in Eastern Region. This was complemented by data from interviews held with teachers, headmasters/mistresses and Ghana Education Services (GES) senior employees. Data analysis took place on two stages. In the first stage, we examine the population scores of the responses of individual respondents for each statement. In the second stage, we carry out a variance analysis to examine the relationship between different variables. [PLing11]*

The LI abstracts had the Method move as a core move and was omitted in some of the abstracts. In the instance of its occurrence, the move was used to present the theory or assumption that guided the arguments of the study. The data and/or research design were scarcely mentioned, for example:

- (9) *Adopting the counter-discursive and autocritical paradigms of postcolonialism as major theoretical framework, the thesis justifies this argument by conducting an in-depth analysis of selected poems from Kofi Anyidoho's last three poetry collections (AncestralLogic & CarribbeanBlues, PraiseSong for TheLand, and The Pace We Call Home and Other Poems) and Ama Ata Aidoo's After the Ceremonies in the light of the concept of dismemberment and the remembering of Africa as propounded by Ngugi wa Thiongo'o and Ayi Kwei Armah. [MLit9]*

Move 4 - Product

The function of the Product move is to state the main findings, the results, the argument, or what was accomplished. The Product move occurs in all research abstracts to promote research works to a discourse community. Hence, the move is often reported as an obligatory move of abstracts (cf. Alyousef 2021, Suwarni

et al 2021). This research, however, indicates that this move is not always obligatory, especially for LI studies.

- (10) *Resistance of the dehumanizing effect of racism includes caring for one another, for children and for black men in ways that keep them from despair. These women writers define themselves, their people and their children in new ways, teaching them about survival and reclaiming an African heritage that permits them to develop a sense of community through extended family knitting. [MLit2]*
- (11) *The study discovers that in disyllabic words, there is preference of trochaic syllable over iambic syllable, acquisition of onset is easier than acquisition of codas and finally explicit teaching is very effective in classroom. [PLing4]*

Importantly, the study found LI abstracts to present arguments as the Product, as seen in Example (10) above. Many of the researchers showed an awareness of the importance of reporting the output of their study in their abstracts.

Move 5 - Conclusion

Hyland (2000) suggests that the Conclusion move exists to interpret the results, draw inferences, and point out the applications of the findings to the wider discourse community. The study found the move to be the least preferred, and therefore, it is optional. This confirms earlier findings by Ren and Li (2011), who considered the move to be optional in these abstracts. Indeed, Marefat and Mohammadzadeh (2013), and Suwarni et al. (2021) assert that the Conclusion is frequently optional in the disciplines of LI and LGL, respectively. This study suggests that the disciplines EL, LI, and LGL have less relevance to the Conclusion move in research abstracts despite the move's important functions.

- (12) *In this sense, the conclusion drawn in this study is that, as African story-tellers telling an African story, the representative Ghanaian writers have contributed to the development of a national literature in which slavery is a major theme. [PLit3]*

A frequent error that was realized in the data was the use of significance of study, or summary of chapters as a pseudo-performer of the Conclusion move. This was not surprising as earlier research works (Alyousef 2021) have mentioned the existence of such possibilities and consider this feature as usual with postgraduate theses abstracts (Ren & Li 2011). In this study, such errors are considered a demonstration of the authors' lack of awareness of the function of the move.

4.3 Sequencing of moves

The use of a well-patterned move structure in abstracts is essential to communicating a goal-directed communicative purpose. An improper ordering of the moves in abstracts obstructs comprehension of the abstract's communicative purpose. Cross and Oppenheim (2006) agree that conceptual scattering of moves reveals writers' inability to structure units of meanings in text and impedes reading comprehension. It was, therefore, expected that most of the authors, being postgraduate scholars, would organize their abstracts following the sequential ordering of the moves. As observed in the data, there were variations in the patterning of the moves. This is indicated in Table 5 below.

<i>Moves</i>	<i>ELanguage</i>	<i>Literature</i>	<i>LinguisticsGL</i>
5 Moves			
M1-M2-M3-M4-M5	4	2	2
4 moves			
M1-M2-M3-M4	9	10	7
M2-M3-M4-M5	1	1	0
M2-M1-M3-M4	3	3	0
3 Moves			
M1-M2-M3	1	5	0
M2-M3-M4	10	1	12
M1-M2-M4	0	3	4
M2-M4-M5	0	0	1
2 Moves			
M1-M2	1	4	1
M2-M4	1	1	3
Total	30	30	30

Table 5: Move structure patterns in the data

The findings in Table 5 contradict El-Dakh's (2018), and Zand-Moghadam and Meihami's (2016) claim that postgraduate theses abstracts mostly prefer 5-move patterns. From the table, it can be inferred that 4-move patterns are preferred in LI and EL theses abstracts, while 3-move patterns are usual in the LGL studies abstracts. The most frequent move pattern of EL and LGL abstracts is the M2-M3-M4 pattern. Bouziane and Metkal (2020) and Pho (2008) suggest that the three moves structure is a conventional pattern with abstracts written in English, and is more productive, concise, and direct in communicating information in abstracts. The LI abstracts preferred the use of the 4-move structure, particularly M1-M2-M3-M4. This variation, compared to that of LGL and EL studies, exists because of the importance of the Introduction move in

the LI abstracts or because of the indicative nature of LI abstracts. Lorés (2004) suggests that the function of research abstracts as indicative, informative, or informative-indicative may account for variations in the patterning of moves of abstracts. This argument may be confirmed by the similarity in the preference for 3-move abstracts in the informative abstracts of EL studies and LGL studies and the preference for 4-move abstracts in the indicative LI abstracts.

4.4 Grammatical features

4.4.1 Sentence structure

An important grammatical feature examined in the text is the structural types of sentences used in the data. The types of sentences that are employed in a move not only underscore the communicative importance of the move but also signal the depth or simplicity of the message, meaning, or function of the move. The findings about this are presented in Table 6 below.

Sentences		Simple	Compound	Complex	Compound-Complex	Total
ELanguage	M1	10	2	23	4	39
	M2	7	1	39	6	53
	M3	16	4	43	5	68
	M4	27	3	72	15	117
	M5	2		5	1	8
			62 (21.8%)	10 (3.5%)	182 (63.9%)	31 (10.8%)
LinguisticsGL	M1	15	3	22	6	46
	M2	22	4	29	5	60
	M3	29		27	13	69
	M4	27	4	79	34	144
	M5	2		2	2	6
			95 (29.2%)	11 (3.4%)	159 (48.9%)	60 (18.5%)
Literature	M1	32	7	65	7	111
	M2	11		33	8	52
	M3	8		18	2	28
	M4	6	1	44	12	63
	M5			3		3
			57 (22.2%)	8 (3.1%)	163 (63.4%)	29 (11.3%)

Table 6: Sentence structures according to moves and discipline

The findings in Table 6 indicate that the least preferred sentence structure employed in the abstracts across the disciplines is the Compound sentence. The Compound-Complex sentence also finds expression in the abstracts but is not as frequent as the Simple and Complex sentences. The Complex sentence is the most frequent structure of sentences that occur across the disciplines. Complex sentences have been considered very relevant to persuasive and argumentative texts that often call “for explicitness and elaboration in the use of language” (Frimpong 2017: 77). Considering the function of abstracts to not only attract scholarly attention to research work but also to provide detailed information concisely, usually with a restricted number of words, it is prudent that the researchers made greater use of the Complex sentences over other forms of structural sentences. However, the frequent use of Simple sentences shows the scholars’ awareness of the need to present their message in a clear, simple way to easily aid the understanding of their messages; hence, they seem to alternate the use of Complex sentences and Simple sentences in their presentation of information.

A very notable variation among the abstracts is the usage of a Simple or a Complex sentence in the moves. It is striking that LI abstracts used a significant number of Simple sentences in the Introduction (Move 1) of the abstracts. This is important as in providing the background to the study, the choice of the Simple sentence essentially makes the context and meaning easier for a reader to understand the essence of the argument that is propounded in the later parts of the abstracts.

4.4.2 Moves’ textual space

The textual space that is given to a particular move represents the move’s importance to the abstract or writer’s communicative intentions. Textual space is considered to be the amount of space accounted for by the number of words allocated to a move (Bonsu & Afful 2022). In other words, textual space can be accounted for by examining the length of each move by the words used (Alyousef 2021). In this study, an attempt was made to examine the textual space of each move. The findings are presented in Table 7 below.

Move	Move 1	Move 2	Move 3	Move 4	Move 5	Total
	Introduction	Purpose	Method	Product	Conclusion	
ELanguage	967 (11.8%)	1,790 (21.8%)	1,872 (22.8%)	3,348 (40.8%)	219 (2.8%)	8,196
Literature	2,707 (41.4%)	1,601 (24.5%)	721 (11.0%)	1,420 (21.7%)	87 (1.3%)	6,536
LinguisticsGL	1,058 (14.0%)	1,429 (18.9%)	1,484 (19.6%)	3,276 (43.3%)	326 (4.2%)	7,573
	4,732	4,820	4,077	8,044	632	

Table 7: Word count in relation to textual space

From Table 7 above, it is evident that the EL and LGL abstracts place much prominence on the Product move in the allocation of textual space. The textual space given to Move 4 accounts for 40.8 per cent of EL abstracts and 43.3 per cent of LGL abstracts. This perhaps occurs because of the importance accorded to the function of Product move in the disciplines to announce new insights (Alyousef 2021, Bonsu & Afful 2022). This affinity of the abstracts in these two disciplines extends to the next preferences of moves with more textual spaces; both EL and LGL grant more closely related textual space to the Method (22.8% and 19.6% respectively) move over the Purpose move (21.8% and 18.9% respectively) and the Introduction move (11.8% and 14.0% respectively). LI abstracts, however, place much prominence on the Introduction move (Move 1), which accounts for 41.4 per cent of the realizations. This marks LI abstracts as different from the other two compared disciplines. LI abstracts have Move 2 as the second frequent move according to the textual space allocated for it, and this is followed by Move 4 and Move 3. All the disciplines have Move 5 as the least prominent move in their abstracts.

4.4.3 Authorial presence

Authorial presence is conceptualized as discourse markers that authors utilize to project themselves and their ideas in texts (Çandarlı et al. 2015). Authors consciously employ authorial presence to create an impression about themselves and their stance in relation to their arguments (Hyland 2000). Presence is usually indexed through the use of pronouns in the texts to mark self-mentions (Ivanic & Camps 2001). According to Çandarlı et al. (2015), the use of these pronouns not only reveals the extent of writers' certainty and credibility but also serves as a means of engaging readers in a dialogue with the arguments of the text. Due to its importance as a vehicle for writers to claim ownership of their research works, authorial presence is often used in research abstracts (Bonsu & Afful 2022). This study examined the occurrence of self-mentions, and/or text, reader or scholar references with personal pronouns as forms of authorial presence in data. The finding of this is presented in the Table 8 below.

RHETORICAL STRUCTURAL PATTERNS OF POSTGRADUATE THESES ABSTRACTS OF RELATED DISCIPLINES: A GENRE STUDY

	ELanguage	Literature	LinguisticsGL
We	1	0	8
I	7	17	3
They	6	15	0
It	8	6	2
He/She	0	8	0
Total	22	46	13

Table 8: Personal pronoun frequency

The findings of this research indicate that personal pronouns are more frequent in LI than in LGL and EL studies perhaps because LI abstracts are more argumentative. Also, the data indicates that while *It* is the most occurring personal pronoun in EL abstracts, *We* is the most in LGL abstracts and *I* is the most for LI abstracts. These differences are significant as they affect both the interaction of readers with the abstracts and the presentation of the authors and their stance on the subjects. The prevalence of *We* in LGL abstracts makes the abstracts more interactive and engaging, while the *I* in LI abstracts is used to accentuate the authors' beliefs and assertiveness in their claims or arguments they propound. The use of the third-person pronouns makes direct reference to others, the study, or their claims as well as generalizations about the claims related to the topic. Notably, personal pronouns were prevalent in the Method (M3) move of the EL and LGL but LI abstracts showed a preference for the personal pronouns in the Introduction (M1) and the Purpose (M2) moves.

5 Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the variations and similarities in the rhetorical structure and lexico-grammatical features of abstracts written in English Language studies, Literature studies, and Linguistics Studies. Generally, the findings suggest that although the three subjects belong to the related discipline of language studies, there exist variations in the nature, function, and preference of moves in the abstracts. EL and LGL abstracts are more informative in nature and function whereas LI abstracts are more indicative. Variations also existed with the grammatical features of authorial presence, textual space, and sentence structures.

These findings challenge earlier scholarship positions on abstracts of related disciplines. For example, the position that abstracts of related disciplines follow a linear order (cf. Alyousef 2021, Bonsu & Afful 2022) is refuted by this study. Again, El-Dakhs (2018), and Zand-Moghadam and Meihami (2016) claim postgraduate theses abstracts often prefer and consider the 5-move patterns as the

most suitable for these abstracts. The findings of this study, however, challenge these assertions. This raises questions about the cause of variations in abstracts. Some studies have assigned it to the status of writers as native or non-native users of language (cf. Al-Khasawneh 2017, Vathanalaotha & Tangkiengsirisin 2018), the language in which an abstract is written (Bouziane & Metkal 2020), or the genre of the abstracts (El-Dakhs 2018, Ren & Li 2011). These positions, of course, provide some substantial truths but fail to account for the similar realizations of the variations in abstracts across related and unrelated disciplines, nativity and language choice. This study holds the position that identifying the discipline-specific functions of abstracts may be the best means to account for variations in abstracts of varying disciplines. As Hyland and Jiang (2018) suggest, disciplinary orientations continue to be a significant source of influence on communicative practices in academic writing. Bunton (2005) makes a similar claim, arguing that sections of theses may show disciplinary-motivated variations which may manifest in the length, structure, and emphasis. The function of the abstract in a discipline as informative, indicative or informative-indicative certainly influences the patterning of the moves and lexico-grammatical features of abstracts as demonstrated by this study. This is because whether native or non-native, writers who belong to a particular discipline receive relatively similar discipline-motivated orientation and often show relatively similar competence in the mastery of the tenets of the discipline including the competence in the writing of these abstracts over time (Çandarlı et al. 2015, Zand-Moghadam & Meihami 2016, Al-Khasawneh 2017). Hence, disciplines that prescribe more informative abstracts like LGL and EL in this study, will have writers produce abstracts that conform to the expected patterns of competence.

Pedagogical implications

The findings revealed that based on Hyland's (2000) model, scholars in disciplines may not frequently follow conventionally rhetorical patterns of abstracts, as also observed by Alyousef (2021). Though the realizations may not be conventional, learners' attention must be drawn to the relevance of observing discipline-defined functional moves and discourse features of these abstracts to foster enculturation into discipline-specific research writing skills. After all, researchers must get abreast with practices related to the communicative tasks associated with a particular discipline's academic writings or texts as pre-patterned solutions to these tasks as part of the academic community's stock of knowledge (Heller & Morek 2015).

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