EXPLORING INTO GRADUATE RESEARCH TERM PAPERS: A QUEST FOR GENERIC DISCIPLINARY TENDENCIES

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory analysis was to capture students' generic tendencies in the organization of original research term papers written by graduate within the same linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary territory. A model proposed by Sheldon (2011) was benchmarked against a corpus of 60 English research term paper introductions to identify the saliency of move schemes along with step and sub-step realizations. At step-level analysis, the proportion of the various steps within Move 2 (indicating a gap, adding to what is known, and presenting positive justification) exhibited a pervasive lack of rhetorical tendency that contradicted the previous genre-based findings. Such an exploration, offers implications for English for research publication purposes instruction and academic literacies based on academic conventions and norms.

Keywords: academic literacies, generic tendencies, research term paper

1. Introduction

Graduate students typically grapple with the challenging and demanding task of writing academic papers, such as term papers, research articles, theses, and dissertations. Unfortunately, they are not commonly aware of academic writing conventions in their disciplinary spheres, especially the rhetorical moves, steps, and strategies that are crucial to advance a systematic academic genre (Jalilifar 2010).

The discrepancy between the writing of native and non-native speakers might appear greater when it comes to the writing of research term papers (henceforth RTPs) that are not frequently published and usually not widely available (Samraj 2004). This situation becomes much worse for non-native writers, as Swales

(2004) asserts that papers with a trace of non-standard English are more subject to rejection than papers ostensibly written by native English speakers. Similarly, Iranian graduate students, like other non-native English language learners, are often found to have problems in providing a well-organized piece of RTP for publication in accredited journals (Khany and Abol-Nejadian 2010).

Samraj (2008: 55) classified the writing of graduate student inquiries into two broad categories: one category deals with the socialization of graduate students into different disciplinary communities through the acculturation process, and the second category includes the discourse analysis of texts produced by students. Theoretically, RTP can be subsumed under the second category since as contended by Hyland (2009: 74), "the discourse perspective views writing as an independent entity that can pinpoint the intentions of the writer through an examination of surface structures".

In the context of genre analysis, special attention has been focused on the generic organizational patterns of the introduction section of English RAs and Ph.D theses (Bunton 2002). As put by Swales (1990), the introduction sections of research articles are the most difficult part because numerous options and decisions are imposed on writers: 'the amount of background knowledge, the authoritative versus sincere tone, the winsomeness of the appeal to readers, and directness of the approach writers should incorporate into their writing'. The Swalesian framework of analysis has also been used as a reference in the rhetorical studies of RAs from different disciplinary perspective (Kanoksilapatham 2005; Lim 2012; Loi 2010; Ozturk 2007; Samraj 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2005, 2008; Shehzad 2007a). As regards comparative cross-cultural investigations concerning Iranian and English writers: Fallahi Moghimi and Mobasher (2007); Keshavarz, Atai and Barzegar (2007); Mahzari and Maftoon (2007); Atai and Habibie (2009); Jalilifar (2010); Jalilifar and Soleimani (2011) have investigated research article (RA) introductions, whereas the rhetorical analysis of English RTPIs written by Iranian writers havenot received the same scrutiny. Simply stated, unlike the research article (RA), RTP genre has not yet reached its deserved status, most notably in the Iranian academic context since there has been, to date, no systematic generic study of the range of texts that can be referred to by this label.

2. Literature review

2.1. The status of RTP genre

The RTP genre commonly crops up in graduate programs and typifies the discursive practices across various disciplines and sub-disciplines; however, a number of criticisms leveled against the RTP have persisted in the academic genre studies scholarship. Simply put, there is still little agreement on the exact margins of this genre to the extent that Brent (2013) called it the 'orphaned child' of writing

studies and Samraj (2004:11) mentioned it as a 'heterogeneous genre' characterized by 'multiply layered communicative purposes' that 'use secondary sources and involve library research where students discuss previous research on certain area.' As contended by Johns (2011: 61), 'there is no distinct, absolute form that can be termed as an 'academic essay' or a 'research paper' that is applicable to every academic classroom'. Similarly, Larson (1982: 812) claimed that it has 'no conceptual or substantive identity', and Pillai (2012:21) has called for a distinction between the terms 'academic essay' and 'research paper'. Whereas the former is 'discursive' in nature and entails the 'writer's evaluation of an issue', the latter rests upon a combination of the 'writer's previous knowledge and expert judgment' that involves exploring 'a domain of knowledge in a logical and integrated manner'. Therefore, what we mean when we say 'research paper' in this study is a paper that depends largely on secondary sources incorporated into the students' texts based on a varied but relatively constant set of conventions.

On the other hand, despite hesitancy over its identity, homogeneity and resemblance to published RAs in quite noteworthy ways as claimed by Samraj and Swales (2000: 54), RTP embodies several distinct characteristics including: length, field knowledge, research expertise, citations, and macro-organizational structure which compare to those RAs being published in the relevant journals. More importantly, academic RA has been shown to have the Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion (IMRAD) structure. Therefore, as far as RTP organization is concerned, its conventional structure or IMRAD can be mapped onto the corresponding RAs being written in the same disciplinary field. Moreover, the rationale for this assumed structural resemblance that graduate students are often urged to publish their RTPs in the most prestigious and internationally discipline-specific journals by their prospective professors.

There have been studies to date that explored various specific aspects of research papers including comparison of various kinds of genres, argumentative essay and scientific report (Walvoord and McCarthy 1990), the sorts of writing experiences encountered by students in writing assignment tasks (Moore and Morton 1999), mismatches of scale (Samraj and Swales 2000), the types of claims made in student texts (Samraj 2004) and the impact of tasks on text (Pillai 2012). Meanwhile, some of the studies on student writing adopted survey methodologies (Cooper and Bikowski 2007) that focused on course syllabuses or instructors' handouts to analyze and classify the types of different writing tasks being assigned to students in the university settings. However, conducting such survey-oriented studies on 'writing assignments' or 'paper assignment instructions' would not provide the solid insights into textual tendencies being favored or disfavored by graduate students.

2.2. The research question

Focus on this academic genre was initially spurred by the difficulties being encountered by student writers and the perpetual dissatisfaction being voiced by

their professors as well as the functional characteristics required in meeting the demands of the kind of academic writing required of them at graduate level. Thus, considering the scarcity of rhetorical analyses done on this genre, the current study can inform us on this campus-wide, student-produced genre that possesses an indispensable position somewhere preceding published RA in the taxonomy of academic writing genres. In light of the stated concerns, the current study seeks to address the following research question:

- What rhetorical structure tendencies characterize English research term paper introductions (RTPIs) written by Iranian graduate students in Applied Linguistics?

3. Method

3.1. The corpus

The corpus comprised 60 Introduction sections of English RTPs in Applied Linguistics submitted by Iranian graduate students to their professors. The graduate students whose RTPs were examined in this study were from three universities in Iran: The State University of Isfahan, the Islamic Azad University of Khorasgan Branch, and the Sheikhbahaee Non-Profit University, with each being represented by 20 RTPs. Academically, these students pass 18 obligatory and optional academic modules (e.g., psycholinguistics, seminar, linguistic issues, ESP, article writing, contrastive linguistics, material development, and testing) during the graduate program and are required to write and submit a publishable RTP corresponding to each module as partial fulfilment of their academic curricular requirements, expectations, and conventions.

The impetus for the choice of the RTPs was two-fold. First, perhaps more importantly, the papers' originality was of prime importance for our analysis as stressed by Skelton (1994). Second, such original research papers that have not gone through the meticulous reviewing and editing processes exerted by the editorial boards of journals could better reveal students' genuine rhetorical tendencies. For determining the sample size, Cochran's equation output (cited in Bartlett et al. 2001) was deployed to include 60 RTPs from a pool of 100 compiled papers. Finally, the principal criteria proposed by Sinclair (2005) were considered for building the intended corpus, namely: following the established IMRAD structure, reporting papers entirely on empirical research, submitted to their professors recent to the date of selection (2014-2015), and solely written by graduate students (only M. A) in the Applied Linguistics discipline. Also, publishability in relevant Applied Linguistic journals was set as a criterion for inclusion or exclusion of the RTPs in the corpus. Moreover, to control variations in the organizational structure, caution was taken to include those papers that had an Introduction section under a discrete heading in their formats directly

succeeding the Abstract and preceding the Method section. For more convenience, each text/ Introduction was allocated a single code protocol (RTP: 1, RTP: 2, RTP: 3…. RTP: 60). Meanwhile, the corpus compilation was assisted by the second and third researcher who re-evaluated all the texts for structural move analysis, identification, and annotation.

3.2. Design

This descriptive study adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyzing the English RTPIs. Following quantitative methodology, the types, the frequency of moves, the corresponding steps and the sub-steps were identified, calculated and tallied. This rthorical exploration was also triangulated by a qualitative analysis of textual data. Since no causality was assumed to exist between the independent variable (students' knowledge of the rthorical structure) and dependent variables (moves, steps, and sub-steps), an *ex post facto* design was selected for this study. Such a type of design is particularly fitting in contexts where the variables stand outside the researchers' control and can be used for text analysis (Cohen et al. 2011). In this case, we examine text features (e.g., use of moves) and see how they vary across rhetorical sections (e.g., introduction section). Owing to the specific nature of the study and assuming that the other intervening variables might have a bearing on the textual organization of the RTPs, the students' introductions length, age, gender, and language proficiency were not determining factors in forming the corpus.

3.3. Procedure

The instrument used for analyzing the RTPIs corpus was Sheldon's (2011) model, a modified version of Swales's (2004) CARS model. Sheldon (2011: 248) suggested that *topic generalization of increasing specificity* (M1-S1) might be seen to have eight steps that set the ground for gap creation. Move 2 comprises three options: two steps, *indicating a gap* (M2-S1A) and *presenting positive justification* (M2-S2) and a sub-step, *adding to what is known* (M2-SS1B). Move 3, *presenting the present work* embraces seven steps with one obligatory, three optional and three 'PSIF' (probable in some fields, as proposed by Swales 2004) steps. Taken together, this model can be schematically described in terms of 3 moves, 10 steps, and 9 sub-steps as illuminated in Table 1. What makes this model distinct from the previous models is that, based on a pilot annotation of the RTPIs concerning the tentative moves, steps, and sub-steps schemas, it more readily accommodates the rhetorical tendencies of graduate students in the current study.

Table 1. Sheldon's (2011) model

Move		Step/Sub-Step
1. Establishing a territory	1	Topic generalization of increasing specificity
	A.	Reporting conclusion of studies
	B.	Narrowing the field
	C.	Writer's evaluation of existing research
	D.	Time-frame of relevance
	E.	Research objective previous studies
	F.	Terminology/definitions
	G.	Generalizing
	H.	Furthering or advancing knowledge
2. Establishing the niche	1	A: Indicating a gap
	B:	Adding to what is known
	2	Presenting positive justification (optional)
3. Presenting the present work	1	Announcing present work descriptively or by purpose (obligatory)
	2	Presenting Research Questions (optional)
	3	Definitional clarifications (optional)
	4	Summarizing methods (optional)
	5	Announcing principal outcomes (PISF)
	6	Stating the value of the research (PISF)
	7	Outlining the structure of the paper (PISF)

Concerning the unit of analysis, a functional-semantic approach was exploited to emphasize the importance of cognitive decision adopted in the identification of the global and local purposes achieved through the functional meanings of steps and sub-steps (Kwan 2006). In the following excerpt, although the first clause gives rise to *topic generalization of increasing specificity* (M1-S1), it assumes the function of Move 2 since step 1 is distinguished by the identification of the gap, where the student underscores the limitation of the study:

(1)   Example 1

Although many scholars investigated the specific needs of students in tourism management, few studies have put graduate students' needs under the spotlight. (RTPI: 55)

Concerning the identification process, the rhetorical analysis and manual coding of the RTP Introductions were initially conducted by the first researcher. To ensure inter-rater reliability, the other two researchers independently classified the 60 introductions in terms of move, step and sub-step structure. Given that the

applying of rhetorical analysis may be skewed by subjective identification of communicative functions, the annotation process was supported by Cohen's *Kappa* (k) estimates of consistency between coders running between 0.68 and 0.92. Among the three coders, reliability was calculated by Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) estimates, indicating an agreement for moves (ICC = 0.91), steps (ICC = 0.84), and sub-steps (ICC =0. 78) (Cotos 2015).

In cases of discrepancy among the coders, the problem was resolved through substantiation of move/step/sub-step realizations mutually to improve the annotation consistency. To be on the safe side, the corpus was reanalyzed for the third time by the first researcher after a one-month interval and the *Phi* coefficient of correlation was calculated (0.87) to indicate the consistency between the two times of analysis.

4. Results

4. 1. Move characteristics

The following subsections report the frequency and sequencing of the three moves in the Introduction section and the steps along with sub-steps realizing each move. As shown in Table 2, the analysis of the introductions is informative for two reasons. First, RTPIs display the same paradigm (M1-M2-M3). Second, the findings reveal that 'deviations in rhetorical structures can easily be captured and traced at the step level' (Basturkmen: 140).

Table 2. Distribution of generic organization of RTPIs

Move/step/sub-step	RTP Introductions	
	Frequency	Percentage
Move 1: Establishing a territory	60/60	100.00
Step 1: Topic generalization	58/58	96.67
A. Reporting of previous studies	55/58	91.67
B. Narrowing the field	47/58	78.33
C. Writer's evaluation of research	17/58	28.33
D. Time-frame of relevance	40/58	66.67
E. Previous research studies	49/58	81.67
F. Terminology/definitions	44/58	73.33
G. Generalizing	6/58	10.00
H. Advancing knowledge	3/58	5.00
Move 2: Establishing a niche	23/60	38.33
Step 1 A: Indicating gaps	12/23	20.00
Step 1 B: Adding to what is known	2/23	3.33
Step 2: Presenting positive justification	9/23	5.60
Move 3: Presenting the study	56/60	93.33
Step 1: Announcing work purposely	49/56	83.05
Step 2: Presenting Research Questions	47/56	78.33
Step 3: Definitional clarifications	6/56	10.00

Step 4: Summarizing methods	40/56	66.67
Step 5: Announcing principal outcomes	3/56	5.00
Step 6: Stating the value of research	16/56	27.12
Step 7: Outlining the structure of paper	0/56	none

Inherently, frequencies might not exhibit much about the magnitude of difference between the move types under the study. Therefore, a chi-square analysis was utilized (*P<.05*) in order to see if the existing discrepancy was statistically meaningful or not. The results specified a slight discrepancy between Move 1 and Move 3 and a significant discrepancy in the distribution of Move 2 across the introductions corpus as revealed in Table 3.

Table 3. Chi-square test for the Moves

Move	**$\chi 2$**	**P-Value**
Establishing a territory	1.10	.59
Establishing a niche	0.00	.24
Presenting the present study	0.48	.57
P<.05	*Critical Value:* 2.304	

4.2. Steps and sub-steps characteristics

4.2.1. Sub-steps in Move 1
As shown in Table 2, the *reporting conclusions of previous studies* (M1-SS1A) was found in almost all the texts, having 58/60 (96.67 %) of occurrences. For example, the student exemplifies the previous items of research in relation to what has been found by other researchers:

(2)   Example 2
         Although <u>Rothfarb</u> (1970) points to the merits of observation for teachers in their
         professional growth, the uses of observation described up to now…. (RPTI: 11)

Narrowing the field (M1-SS1B) is prominent in the texts where it achieved 47/58 (78.33 %) occurrences. Narrowing the focus of the research area can highlight the inadequacies of the previous works, paving the ground for niche establishment.

(3)   Example 3
         One of the <u>important issues</u> or <u>even problems</u> in ESP courses is the matter of vocabulary
         learning. (RTPI: 16)

In the same vein, the *writer's evaluation of the current state of research area* (M1-SS1C), is not widely employed by the graduate students, with only 17/58 (28.33%) instances. The epistemic markers "may encounter," has supported the student to claim knowledge with an uncertain degree of confidence.

(4)   Example 4
         Moreover, in every field of study the students <u>may encounter</u> some technical and general
         words in their field of study. (RTPI: 41)

Through the *time-frame of relevance* (M1-SS1D), the students constituted a
disciplinary community with a long convention, using such phrases as 'In the
earliest days'. In doing so, the research territory of Move 1was strengthened by
explanations of the historical background of prior research, where an assortment
of citations was rendered throughout the text. The relatively high incidence
observed, 40/58 (66.67%) is indicative of this tendency.

(5)   Example 5
         <u>In the earliest days</u> of the field of applied linguistics, the main preoccupation was with
         devising attitude tests. (RTPI: 32)

Other incidences of increasing specificity were mainly realized through the
research objective/ process of previous studies (M1-SS1E) of which there were
49/58 (81.67%) occurrences. This excerpt specifies the research aims of previous
studies, verifying the disciplinary sphere and enhancing the writer's ownership of
knowledge. For instance:

(6)   Example 6
         The present study that is of an <u>exploratory</u> nature makes an attempt to find out if unseen
         observation can be beneficial for English teachers or not. (RTPI: 23)

Increasing specificity was realized through *terminology/definitions* (M1-SS1F)
where the graduate students further substantiated their research via incorporating
44/58 (73.33%) occurrences as explained below. The lexical choice of the
sentences and the present tense mode specify that they are extrapolations aimed
at locating the excerpt within a well-established domain.

(7)   Example 7
         Dewey (1933) <u>defines</u> reflection as 'turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious
         and consecutive consideration', thereby enabling us 'to act in a deliberate and intentional
         fashion' (as cited in Freese 1999). (RTPI: 31)

Generalizing (M1-SS1G) had a lower number of occurrences, only 6/58 (10%)
incidences. Since 'Generalizing' is one of the eight rhetorical features in this
model, it appears that the students are less inclined to generalize the field by
incorporating this step.

(8)   Example 8
         There are a number of issues EGP teachers and/or ESP practitioners <u>face</u> when they take
         the responsibility of a comparatively more diverse job of ESP teaching. (RTPI: 58)

The last step, *advancing knowledge* (M1-SS1H) occurred sporadically. Thus, the instances of this step are not numerically large, merely 3/58 (5%) for all the students.

4.2.2. Steps in Move 2

The analysis of the RTPIs corpus has confirmed that research niches are established via two rhetorical steps, 'indicating a gap' and 'presenting positive justification', but their frequencies differ vastly. While *indicating a gap* (M2-S1A) was found in 12/23 (20%) and *presenting positive justification* (M2-S2) in 9/23(15.60%) of the RTPIs, *adding to what is known* (M2-S1B) was incorporated in merely 2/23 (2.33%). Table 2 displays the frequencies of niche establishment in Move 2. The graduate students intriguingly exhibit weaker versions of Move 2, but not to the extent that the three discrete moves are compressed into two.

In the same vein, Lim (2012: 240) identified four sub-steps in which writers indicate a gap in previous research: (i) highlighting the complete absence of research, (ii) stressing insufficient research, (iii) revealing a limitation, and (iv) contrasting conflicting findings. As shown in Table 4, the low incidence of gap indications, and 14/60 (27.12%) may be ascribed to low occurrences of the sub-steps 1A, 1B, 1C, and 1D. In other words, graduate students are more inclined to indicate a gap only if it is expedient to reveal the limitations of past research in this discipline.

Table 4. Lim's (2012) niche-related sub-steps of Move 2

Sub-steps	Description	Occurrence	Percentage
SS1A	Highlighting the absence	2/12	16.66
SS1B	Stressing insufficiency	6/12	50.00
SS1C	Revealing limitation	11/12	91.66
SS1D	Contrasting conflicts	4/12	33.33
Total number of RTPIs		14/60	27.12

Additionally, based on elaborations of such gap statements made in the introductions of Computer Science (CS) research articles, Shehzad (2008: 44) proposed a gap taxonomy that offers choices for the realization of Move 2. Table 5 delineates the meaning, occurrences, and percentages of the gap-statement taxonomy in Move 2. As can be seen, they preferred 'short' gaps over the rest of the gaps. Next in rank was 'embedded' followed by 'gap reports', 'research questions', and 'extension'. That is, while the 'short' gaps were more apparently prevalent, all the RTPIs were void of 'multiple act', 'lengthy', 'reported' and 'contrastive'. The sound results gained attest to the graduate students' unawareness of the rhetorical function of these gaps as their employments was rethorically insignificant.

Table 5. Shehzad's (2008) taxonomy of gap statements

Taxonomy	Description	Occurrence	Percentage
Short	brief, easy to identify	12/23	52.17
Gap reports	mentioning gaps	4/23	17.39
Lengthy	extended to sentences	0/23	none
Embedded	intertwined with other moves	5/23	21.73
Multiple act	acts realizing a sub-purpose	0/23	none
Reported	identified by target community	0/23	none
Question	rationale of the present research	1/23	4.34
Extension	continuation of past research	1/23	4.34
Contrastive	rendering of opposing ideas	0/23	none

4.2.3. Steps in Move 3

Announcing present work descriptively and/or purposively (M3-S1) occurred 49/56 (83.05%). The excerpt below displays that an approach to knowledge claim is made by the student via placing the deictic, 'This paper…' in initial locus, followed by a verb in the present tense such as 'investigate'. This points to a thorough account of the research purpose, providing detachment, especially through the verb 'investigate', conveys a robust sense. The following instance shows this rhetorically salient feature:

(9)   Example 9
       This study investigates the target needs of students of tourism and hotel management at
       Isfahan University and to evaluate retrospectively …. (RTPI: 44)

Concerning *presenting research questions or hypotheses* (M3-S2), the graduate students prefer to present the research question rather than offer hypotheses, although they seem resistant to outlining the research question. There were 47/56 (78.33%) instances in the corpus. By placing 'what' and 'how' in their initial questions, the student gives a specific account of what his or her study is attempting to discover. An instance of this step specified as follows:

(10)   Example 10
       So this study investigates the needs of physics students of Payame Noor University. It is
       attempt to answer the following two questions:
       1. What are the needs of physics students of Payame Noor University?
       2. How do the materials of this course help them get the goal of the course? (RTPI: 23)

Definitional clarifications (M3-S3) have 6/56 (10%) of occurrences. The graduate student informs readers of how a particular concept is understood, with the aim of incorporating the study in a specific domain via explicit assertions clarifying conceptual definitions and terminologies. For instance:

(11)   Example 11
        The popular <u>concept</u> today is that 'one's background knowledge plays a more important
        Role than new words and new structures in reading comprehension' (Rumelhart 1985).
        (RTPI: 39)

Summarizing methods (M3-S4) is rendered in the corpus by 40/56(66.67%)
instances. The excerpt below indicates that confirmatory textual effects elaborated
the research methodology. For example:

(12)   Example 12
        This was an <u>explanatory study</u> with an intact class. Variables were age and idiom
        acquisition as dependent variables. (RTPI: 47)

The low incidence of *announcing principal outcomes* (M3-S5), 3/56(5%), may be
ascribed to the likelihood that Iranian graduate students are very cautious and
reserved in making claims.

(13)   Example 13
        The findings <u>are expected to contribute to</u> the way feedback is employed in TEFL classes;
        specifically, to the improvement of L2 learners' speaking performance. (RTPI: 5)

The less frequent occurrence of *Stating the value of the present research* (M3-S6),
16/56 (27.12%), is indicative of the tendency that they do not see any necessity to
state the value of their research, maybe due to having presented their work
purposefully in step 1, where they make strong claims for the rationality of their
research. In regard to *outlining the structure of the paper* (M3-S7), the students
may have felt no pressure to announce the structure of their papers. This step
seems absent in the RTPIs corpus.

5. Discussion

Given the number, types, and frequency of moves, steps and sub-steps of RTPIs,
we can capture some rhetorical structure tendencies by examining Tables 2, 3, 4,
and 5. Overall, the most salient features lie in the pervasive absence of Move 2
(roughly 60%) and textual preference for the Move 1–Move 3 type. Such a
rhetorical tendency has also been identified in studies conducted by Samraj
(2002b) and Ozturk (2007), among others.

5.1. Establishing a territory (Move 1)

Taken together, it seems that the graduate students are not more prone to deploy the all eight sub-steps to substantiate the importance of their discipline, promote the significance of their study, and establish their research territory through knowledge claims or contributions. They showed more inclinations towards the *reporting conclusion of previous studies* (M1-S1A), *narrowing the field* (M1-S1B), *research objective or process previous studies* (M1-S1E), and *terminology or definitions* (M1-S1F). Consequently, the results of this part comply with Shehzad (2007a) who asserted that the writers employed a wide array of sub-steps within Moveb1 to position their scholarships in the research territory, making their texts more stimulating and suitable to the discipline. Based on Table 2, the total of all the occurrences of sub-steps of Move 1 was more than Move 2 and Move 3 indicating the critical significance of this constituent move, which contradicts Keshavarz et al. (2007) study of Applied Linguistics research article (RA) introductions concerning Move 1. Further, this tendency is in compliance with Atai and Habibi (2009) who claimed that the writer resorts to various combinations of sub-steps to impress and convince the academic community of the merit of his study.

5.2. Establishing a niche (Move 2)

Regarding Move 2, the instances cited clearly illustrate that the students have not built an explicit critical stance to highlight the shortcomings, insufficiencies, absences, and conflicts of previous studies. Swales and Feak (2004) argue, 'The introduction remains flat' when the writer does not create a space through explicit specification of the gap, an observation that can be extended to the majority of students in this study. A note-worthy group of studies within the area of the genre analysis reported the perceived failure to establish niche in articles: in Chinese (Taylor and Chen 1991), Swedish (Fredrickson and Swales 1994), Malaysian (Ahmad 1997), Spanish (Burgess 2002; Moreno 2010), Thai (Jogthong 2001), Arabic (Fakhri 2004), Hungarian (Arvay and Tanko 2004), Brazilian and Portuguese (Hirano 2009) and English (Shehzad 2008; Lim 2012). Moreno (2010: 69) noted that gap indication is not a 'must' and its exclusion is characteristic of the Spanish academic written culture. Burgess (2002) discovered that nearly 50% of RAs written in Spanish eliminated Move 2, while in the present study only 38.30% did so. Jogthong (2001) reported an obvious absence of Move 2 in 45% of the Thai papers analyzed while in Ahmad's (1997) corpus of Malay RAIs 35% lacked Move 2.

Some tentative explanations have been proposed to account for this noticeable lack of niche establishment in the research article genre. One of them is the 'emerging status of research areas in developing countries in sharp contrast to established fields' by Samraj (2002). Another explanation, put forward by Swales and Najjar (1987), is that in smaller discourse communities, authors feel less

competitive pressure for a research space. One explanation is the proposal by Burgess (2002) that 'the writers from the Spanish-language background resist criticizing previous studies because they belong to a small community'. One more possibility that sounds more plausible for the current study regards students' rhetorical propensities, as discussed in Jalilifar (2010: 54) who compared international and local research articles introductions (RAIs). He believes that 'lack of awareness of rhetorical specification of introduction' and 'insufficient attention to wider discipline' plus 'little knowledge on the patterns employed in a particular subdiscipline' on the part of the writers are the main causes. In addition, the findings in this study challenge those of Keshavarz et al. (2007) in that they claimed no variation in RAs by Iranian writers concerning Move 2.

5.3. Presenting the study (Move 3)

With respect to Move 3, although the RTPIs do not incorporate all the seven steps by the same token, they display tendencies towards *announcing work purposively* (M3-S1), *presenting research questions* (M3-S2), and *summarizing methods* (M3-S4). In particular, the students are more inclined to downplay *definitional clarifications* (M3-S3), *announcing principal outcomes* (M3-S5), *stating the value of the present research* (M3-S6), and *outlining the structure of the paper* (M3-S7) in the course of shaping the RTPIs. All things considered, the broad discussion of previous works was so prevalent in different parts of RTPIs that this step was no longer restricted to Move 1 but was manifested in Move 2 and Move 3 implying that students might be aware of the obligatory function of this particular step. This is in line with Jalilifar (2010: 53) who claimed that Iranian scholars seem to reveal the purposes of their work in the research article introductions. Also, it is not in consonance with the findings of Keshavarz et al. (2007: 30) that claimed 24% of Iranian writers failed to defend and present their study. Additionally, Fallahi Moghimi and Mobasher (2007: 71) noted that the step, *outlining purposes,* the obligatory element of Move 3, was exploited in English articles more than Iranian counterparts. Similarly, there was also a greater tendency by graduate students towards explicitly *presenting the research questions* (M3-S2). The subsequent step, *definitional clarifications* (M3-S3), was infrequently exploited making allusion indirectly to the optional nature of this step that might not characterize Applied Linguistic introductions. *Summarizing the methods* (M3-S4) was found to a much greater extent as Swales (2004, cited in Jalilifar and Soleimani 2011) notes that this step is utilized 'especially in papers whose principal outcome can be deemed to reside in their methodological innovations, extended definitional of key terms, detailing the research questions or hypotheses, and announcing the principal outcomes.'

The last three steps, M3-S5, M3-S6, and M3-S7 that have the lowest frequency may be attributed to disciplinary conventions as emphasized by Swales (2004: 232) that are 'probable in some fields (PSIF), but are unlikely in others'. For

instance, *outlining the structure of the paper* (M3-S7) as a 'roadmap' that appears as an ultimate option in Move 3 configuration 'seems to inversely function whether the disciplinary field has an established IMRAD structure or not' (Swales: 232). On the other hand, we argue that the students constitute Move 3 along the lines of the expectations of their discipline's practice and readership (their professors). Besides, acknowledging that observed rhetorical structure tendencies in the RTPIs may not be solely owing to different disciplinary values, but other contextual factors such as the kind of task assigned and professors' expectations can also impact the types of texts shaped. On the whole, occupying a niche can be taken, as suggested by Lyda and Warchal (2014: 2), 'as a frame of reference for discussion of what is culture-bound, culture-sensitive, and culture-free in the academic community and its practices'.

6. Conclusions

The current analysis of RTPIs brings us to the conclusion that the noticeable rhetorical structure tendencies can be traced in terms of move combinations along with marked step and sub-step realizations that might be elaborated by a number of intervening factors. The overall findings are compatible with Samraj (2002a:175) who asserted 'contextual layers' surrounding student-produced texts should be taken into account not solely disciplinary values and also Jalilifar (2010: 54) who claimed that rhetorical tendencies should be analyzed in terms of 'discoursal, cultural, and lack of rhetorical awareness' factors.

Analysis concerning move theory indicates that graduate students do not display a close adherence to the generic schemas of this rthorical section, showing hybrid patterns as a sign of the saliency of move combinations along with the marked step and sub-step realizations. At step-level analysis, the proportion of the various steps within Move 2 exhibited a lack of rhetorical tendency for indicating a gap, adding to what is known, and presenting positive justification in introduction sections. Also, regarding the niche-related sub-steps proposed by Lim (2012) as a means of gap indication for challenging previous studies, these strategies appeared not to be favored by graduate students at large. By means of becoming aware of the rhetorical organization most widely utilized in English RTPIs, graduate students might be in a better position to make informed rhetorical adoptions based on Sheldon's (2011) model as a potential template. Such an analysis, therefore, maybe beneficial to English for research publication purposes (ERPP) instruction, material, and curriculum development, and provide implications for academic literacies (ALs) through shedding light on textual and academic norms.

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