

A CONTRASTIVE GENRE-BASED STUDY: ENGLISH AND MALAY

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This paper reports on a contrastive genre-based study comparing the employment of communicative purposes (moves) and rhetorical strategies (steps) between Malay and English research article discussions in using the move-structure models proposed by Holmes (1997). The focus is on research article discussions in the field of humanities and social sciences. Results show that both sets of discussions emphasize Move 2 (evaluating the findings). Overall, article discussions in both languages show the presence of the three moves (introductory, evaluation and conclusion) although Move 1 and Move 3 are under-represented in Malay discussions. The rhetorical-step model of English discussions that emerged in the present study (see Table 1) will be worth exploring with language instructors and ESL (English as second language) students (Malay ESL students in particular) in EAP classrooms.

Keywords: Academic writing, Communicative purposes, Malay research articles, Rhetorical strategies.

Introduction

The bulk of the genre-based research to date has dealt with research article sections or research articles in their entirety in the natural sciences (e.Crookes, 1986; Dudley-Evan, 1986; Swales, 1990 & 2004) rather than with articles in the humanities and social sciences (Holmes, 1997). According to Holmes (1997), this was perhaps unfortunate as more and more students nowadays study social science subjects in English as a second language.

Past studies on the discussion section have identified various move-structure models (e.g. Hopkins and Dudley-Evans, 1988; Holmes, 1997; Swales & Feak, 1994; Peacock, 2002). One of the earliest studies on the discussion section by Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988, p.118) identified eleven moves in the discussion section of M.Sc. dissertations and articles on irrigation and drainage published in the proceedings of an international conference. Dudley-Evans (1994) proposed a 9-move structure. Based on Hopkins and Dudley-Evans's (1988, p.118) move-structure model of natural science discussion sections,

Holmes (1997) proposed a modified version of the model for humanities and social sciences discussion sections which comprises eight moves including a new move 'outlining parallel or subsequent developments' which Holmes found in the concluding paragraphs of history articles. Writers of history articles employed this move to provide a "presentation in summary form of data additional to that given in the main body of the article" (p.324). Moves in Holmes's model are therefore: (i) background information (ii) statement of result (iii) (un)expected outcome (iv) reference to previous research (v) explanation of unsatisfactory result (vi) generalization (vii) recommendation and (viii) outlining parallel or subsequent developments. Holmes's model which was designed for discussion sections in the humanities and social sciences specifically, domains similar to those of the research articles examined in the present study was used as the starting points in this study which investigated humanities and social sciences research article discussions in Malay and English. Differences between research article discussions were examined. The findings have pedagogical implications in an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) classroom.

Methodology

A total of 34 research article discussions restricted to empirical studies (17 from each corpus – Malay and English) were randomly selected from journals in the field of humanities and social science. The Malay corpus was selected from two local journals: *Sosiohumanika* and *e-Bangi*, *Journals of Social Sciences and Humanities* published between 2010 and 2013. *e-BANGI Journal* is a refereed electronic journal of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi Selangor. *Sosiohumanika* is a scientific journal in the field of humanities and social sciences. The journal is published by ASPENSI (Asosiasi Sarjana Pendidikan Sejarah Indonesia – Association of Indonesian Scholars of History Education) in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The English corpus was taken from the *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* published between 2011 and 2014. The journal is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal published by the Center for Promoting Ideas (CPI) in the United States of America.

Using the discussion section model outlined by Holmes (1997) (see details in literature review), moves and rhetorical steps were coded in the present study. Some modifications were made by extending the scope of the rhetorical strategies based on the findings that emerged in the study. Categories (direct equivalents) similar to those suggested by Holmes (1997) are 'background information', and 'recommendation'. In the present study, categories which are more or less equivalent to categories in Holmes's model are 'statement of main findings' (statement of result in Holmes's model), 'clarification' (explanation of unsatisfactory result) and 'comparing between present and past research' (reference to previous research). In the present study, 'statement of main findings' however includes the presentation of findings as well as both expected or unexpected outcomes. The clarification category in the present study has a wider rhetorical function than Holmes's 'explanation of unsatisfactory results' category. In the present study 'clarification' includes explanation of other aspects such as subject matter, deduction, phenomenon, etc., in addition to 'unsatisfactory results'.

Results

Overall, article discussions in both languages show the presence of the three moves (introductory, evaluation and conclusion) although Move 1 and Move 3 are under-represented in Malay discussions (see Figure 1). Move 1 (introducing the discussion section) serves as a reference to the method, aim, focus, and background information relating to the topic. Move 2 (evaluating the main findings) serves to provide details of findings and interpretations that go beyond the statements of principal findings while Move 3 (concluding the discussion section) often includes establishing the merits of the research findings in relation to the relevant field.

English research article discussions frequently begin with Move 1 (introductory move) (47.1%) followed by Move 2 (41.2%) and Move 3 (11.8%) while Malay research article discussions frequently start with Move 2 (evaluation move) (58.8%) followed by Move 1 (29.4%) and Move 3 (5.9%). The higher number of step options (at least 10 rhetorical steps, see Table 1 and Table 2) employed in the evaluation move (Move 2) compared to the introductory and concluding moves (Move 1 and Move 3 respectively) of both discussions, strongly indicate that the communicative focus in both discussions is primarily in the evaluation move (Move 2) of the discussion section. In addition, 100% of English and Malay research article discussions employ Move 2, while fewer discussion sections employ Move 1 (58.8% vs 29.4) and Move 3 (47% vs. 17.6%). The following figure illustrates these results:

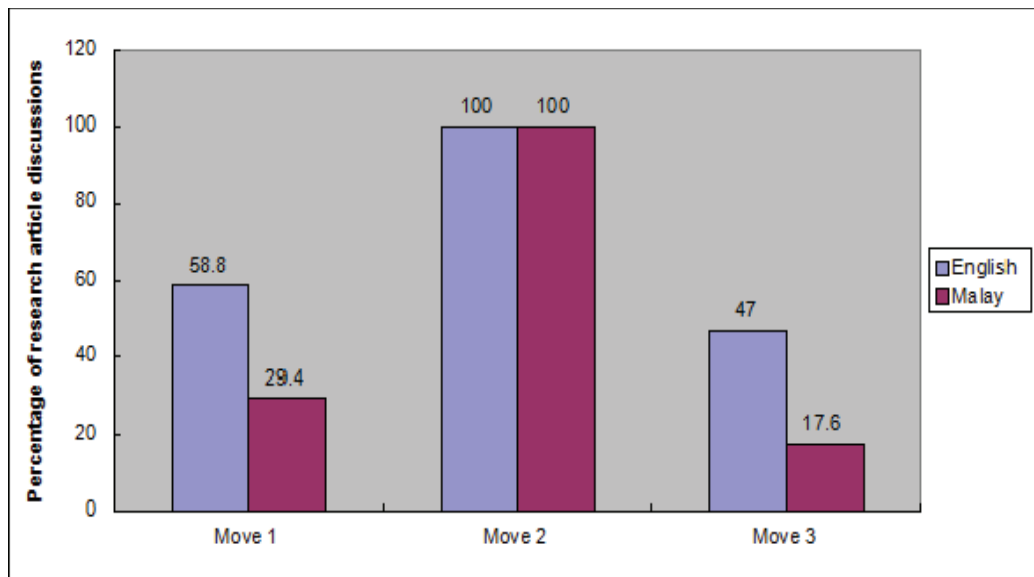


Figure 1. Frequency counts of English and Malay research article discussions employing the move

A closer examination of Move 2 (the most frequently-used move in the two sets of discussions) indicates that overall the most frequently-used steps in English research article discussions are *deduction* (100%), *statement of finding* (82.4%), *counter-claim* (76.5%) and *comments* (76.5%). Similarly, *deduction* (100%) and *statement of finding* (94.2%) are the two most frequently-used steps in Malay discussions. However, *clarification* (82.4%) is the third most frequently-used step in Malay discussions.

Another notable difference between the two sets of discussions is in the number of step options employed in the discussions. Malay discussions use only slightly more than half as many rhetorical step options/types than English discussions do (13 vs. 21) (see Table 1 and Table 2). This suggests that the eight rhetorical steps which do not occur in Malay discussions are perhaps less important in Malay than in English discussions. These eight rhetorical steps are

- (i) restating the aim
- (ii) restating the method
- (iii) restating the focus of the study
- (iv) acknowledging the limitations of the present study
- (v) referring to limitations of past studies
- (vi) making recommendations
- (vii) justifying future research
- (viii) providing background information relating to variables in Move 3

The greatest discrepancy in step options between articles in the two languages is in the concluding move (Move 3). That is, out of the seven step options represented in the concluding move of English discussions, five step options (v to ix above) are not used in Malay discussions. There is thus less complexity in Malay research article discussions in the initial introductory move and even less complexity in the concluding move of the discussions.

As a result of these findings two models which offer a macro-structure of the rhetorical structure in the discussion section emerge, namely (a) a model of Malay research article discussions with fourteen rhetorical steps and (b) model of English research article discussions with twenty-two rhetorical steps (see Tables 1 and 2) below. These two models comprise three-move frameworks involving a series of rhetorical-step cycles combining two or more of the rhetorical steps as labeled in the models.

Table 1. 13 rhetorical-step model of Malay research article discussions

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| <p>Move 1 – introducing the discussion section</p> <p>Step 1 – providing background information relating to the topic (and/or)</p> <p>Move 2 – evaluating the main findings</p> <p>Step 1 – providing background information relating to variables in Move 2 (and/or)</p> <p>Step 2 – formulating the research questions (and/or)</p> <p>Step 3 – presenting the findings (and/or)</p> <p>Step 4 – making deductions (and/or)</p> <p>Step 5 – comparing present and past findings (and/or)</p> <p>Step 6 – counter-claiming (and/or)</p> <p>Step 7 – making comments (and/or)</p> <p>Step 8 – clarifying (and/or)</p> <p>Step 9 – exemplifying (and/or)</p> <p>Step 10 – hypothesizing</p> <p>Move 3 – concluding the discussion section</p> <p>Step 1 – claiming the significance of the study (and/or)</p> <p>Step 2 – claiming the implications of the study</p> |
|---|

Table 2. 21 rhetorical-step model of English research article discussions

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| <p>Move 1 – introducing the discussion section</p> <p>Step 1 – providing background information (relating to the topic) (and/or)</p> <p>Step 2 – restating the aim (and/or)</p> <p>Step 3 – restating the method (and/or)</p> <p>Step 4 – restating the focus of the study</p> <p>Move 2 – evaluating the main findings</p> <p>Step 1 – providing background information relating to variables in Move 2 (and/or)</p> <p>Step 2 – formulating the research questions (and/or)</p> <p>Step 3 – presenting the findings (and/or)</p> <p>Step 4 – making deductions (and/or)</p> |
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Step 5 – comparing present and past findings (and/or)
 Step 6 – counter-claiming (and/or)
 Step 7 – making comments (and/or)
 Step 8 – clarifying (and/or)
 Step 9 – exemplifying (and/or)
 Step 10 – hypothesizing

Move 3 – concluding the discussion section

Step 1 – claiming the significance of the study (and/or)
 Step 2 – claiming the implications of the study (and/or)
 Step 3 – acknowledging the limitations of the present study (and/or)
 Step 4 – referring to limitations of past studies (and/or)
 Step 5 – making recommendations (and/or)
 Step 6 – justifying future research (and/or)
 Step 7 – providing background information relating to variables in Move 3

As seen above, Malay discussions are generally not as rhetorically elaborate and complex as English discussions in terms of the variety of rhetorical steps used (13 vs. 21) to realize three moves in the discussion section.

Another major difference between the two sets of data concerns the scope of the information which realizes the rhetorical strategies. Malay discussions generally exhibit less elaborate description than English discussions do. For example, in presenting main findings, Malay discussions do not indicate whether the findings are (un)expected nor do they provide an explanation for the (un)expected outcomes, whereas this happens in English discussions.

E4- Considering the abovementioned explanations about the unfavorable work and employment conditions in the health care industry, the specific organizational positions of nurses, the nature of their work and the complexity of their roles, **this finding is not surprising**. Because health care employees are exposed to difficult work environments such as ... Moreover, health care service is an area where comprehensive, rapid, intensive and radical transformations are experienced in a global sense (DiMartino, 2003).

E-7 Comparing this finding with related studies ... **Contrary to expectations**, perceived HIV/AIDS vulnerability had no significant independent influence on sexual attitude in this study. Although virtually all major theories of health protective behavior assume that precautionary behavior is related to perceived vulnerability, the application of the assumption in certain cases could be called to question.

M3- Dalam hasil perbincangan ini, penyelidik mendapati faktor sokongan sosial mempunyai hubungan kaitan dengan penghargaan sendiri remaja sekolah. *M3-In this discussion, the research found that social support factors are associated with the self esteem of adolescents*

Other examples which illustrate this lower complexity of information are shown below. The excerpt from M12 (Malay corpus) does not provide clarifications for the findings that emerged in the study in the way that the excerpt from (E3) English corpus does:

E3-Result also showed that male workers do not exhibit greater mental workload than female workers. (Presenting the findings) This suggests that both male and female workers ... [Making deduction] They both experience mental and emotional strain on the job. The probable explanation of this finding is that ... [Clarifying] This corroborates Riley, et al. (1994) that investing mental effort into a work activity can make the influence of stressors such as ... [Comparing present and past findings] Furthermore, age and educational qualifications do not have significant main influence on job performance.

M12- Daripada 90% atau 99% responden mengatakan bahawa ... [Presenting findings] Ini membuktikan bahawa media massa elektronik memainkan peranan penting dalam ... [Making deductions] selaras dengan dapatan kajian-kajian lain yang mendapati bahawa ... (Hairi Abdullah, 1975/1976; ...). [Comparing present and past findings]

Writers in Malay discussions tend to downgrade and restrict the coverage of information in the concluding moves to indications of the significance of the study and implications of the study, while English discussions seem to employ five additional rhetorical strategies in this move. This difference seems to relate to the expectation that writers and readers in both corpora have of the concluding part of a discussion section. Acknowledging the limitations of the present study, referring to the limitations of past studies, making recommendations, justifying future research and providing background information relating to variables in Move 3 are not steps that are used in the concluding move of Malay discussions. Despite the differences, the corpora also share some similarities. In addition to the presence of similar rhetorical strategies (see Table 1 and Table 2), rhetorical steps within the same move in both corpora are commonly realized cyclically rather than linearly or in a composite manner.

Discussion

The main similarities between the two sets of research article discussions are that both English and Malay discussions employ a three-move framework involving a series of rhetorical step cycles combining two or more of the rhetorical steps (see Table 1 and Table 2). The focus of the two sets of discussions is very much on Move 2 (evaluating the findings). Move 2 was found to be obligatory (appearing in 100% of research articles). It is also the most extensive move in both discussions, comprising a typical pattern with making deductions the commonest step (100% of the two sets of discussions employing the step) and the ‘head’ step in a cycle. The second most frequently-used rhetorical step in both discussions is presenting the findings (82.4% of English and 94.2% of Malay discussions employ the step). The findings show that in Malay discussions the cycle presenting the findings (94.2%) – making deductions (88.2%) – clarifying (82.4%) occurs most frequently.

In contrast, in English discussions, the cycle making deductions (100%) – presenting the findings (82.4%) – counter-claiming (76.5%) and making comments (76.5%) occurs more frequently (as shown in the number of articles employing these rhetorical steps). This suggests that, in contrast to writers of English discussions, writers of Malay discussions appear to spend more time explaining their own results/deductions than making counter claims and comments on their findings/deductions and/or the literature. It is conceivable that writers of Malay articles (non-English articles) have less tendencies to make their work more prominent than do their English language counterparts and so they do not actively engage in counter-claiming and making comments (c.f Ahmad, 1997; Holmes, 1997; Peacock, 2002; Taylor & Chen, 1991).

Because a relatively small corpora was used (34 discussions -17 discussions from each corpus), the present study does not aim to generalize the findings to an entire discipline. Far more cross-cultural research involving the two languages (Malay and English) needs to be undertaken for research article discussions in the field of humanities and social sciences in order to develop our knowledge of the regularities and variations relating to rhetorical strategies and their cycles within individual moves.

Conclusion

This comparative genre analysis provides an insight into the distinctive communicative functions of the discussions sections of research articles in two languages (English and Malay). Generally, compared to Malay discussions, English discussions have a higher regularity of linear move sequence (Move 1- Move2- Move 3). English discussions are also more complex with a higher number of rhetorical-step options in both the introductory and concluding moves of the discussions. The rhetorical-step model of

English discussions that emerged in the present study (see Table 2) will be worth exploring with language instructors and ESL (English as second language) students (Malay ESL students in particular) in EAP classrooms.

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