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Comparative Study of Generic Structural Elements in Research Article Abstracts of Selected Arts-Based Disciplines

Kazeem K. Olaniyan [α] & Ige, Nafiu S. [σ]

Abstract- Academic genre analysts have over the last few decades preoccupied themselves with the description of rhetorical organisation of different academic genres. This is done with a view to providing writers (most especially young entrants into academic discourse community) with knowledge on academic genre literacy. Extant literature reveals that generic structural elements of arts-based research article abstracts have not been much explored using generic comparative analytical approach/perspective and this creates a research vacuum in the literature. This study therefore fills the vacuum as it carries out a comparative study of Generic Structural Elements in Research Article Abstracts of Selected Arts-Based Disciplines. This is done with a view to determining the generic structural variations across disciplines. The study utilised as data three hundred abstracts, 100 from each group, purposively selected from 27 journals in Languages and Communication (LC), 13 in Literary and Creative Arts (LCA) and 25 in Cultural Studies and Philosophy (CSP) published between 2001 and 2010. The journals selected are domiciled in universities in the inner circle (countries where English is spoken as mother tongue). The generic structural elements of these abstracts are comparatively analysed using insights from the Generic Structural Potential analytical tool of SFG.

Findings of the study reveal that Background Information, Problem Statement, Statement of Objectives, Findings and Conclusion cut across abstracts from LC, LCA and CSP; analytical framework is found in LC but absent in LCA and CSP; Methodology is found in LC and CSP but absent in LCA; and Theoretical Framework (TF) is found in LC and CSP but absent in LCA. The study concludes therefore that a comparative exploration of generic structural elements in selected arts-based disciplines has, among others, potency of enhancing a better understanding of the genre structure of the selected disciplines. It recommends that a comparative study of generic structural elements of research article abstracts in other fields of human endeavours outside the arts be carried out as this would assist future researchers in determining representation of these generic structural elements in other fields that may be chosen.

I. Introduction

Genre analysts, among other linguists, have over the last few decades preoccupied themselves with the provision of a framework for the study of academic and professional discourse patterns through the description of the rhetorical organization of different genres commonly used in academic writing/reading instruction (e.g. see Swales and Feak; 1994; Duddley Evans and Henderson (1993); Bhatia 1993 etc.) Such descriptive studies, as noted by Motta-Roth (1999: 96), are intended to, among other things, provide writers (especially the beginners) with: (i) knowledge about the form; (ii) knowledge about the content, (iii) knowledge about the function and (iv) knowledge about the contextual features manifested by texts that are accepted as exemplars of a given academic genre by expert readers in each field (e.g. refereed journal editors, dissertation committee members etc.).

Existing comparative studies of genres of academic writings have explored different genres of academic discourse using varieties of approaches and linguistic tools (e.g. see Martin-Martin, (2002); Samraj (2002, 2004), Lores (2004), Kanoksilapatham (2007), .Pho (2008), Breeze (2009), Cava (2010), Lim (2010); Ulker (2012); Chalak and Norouzi (2013), Marefat and Mohammadzadeh (2013); Saeeaw1 and Tangkiengsirisin (2014); Talakoob and Shafiee (2016); Noorizadeh-Honami and Chalak (2018) etc.). Extant literature reveals that generic structural elements of arts-based research article abstracts have not been exclusively explored using generic comparative analytical approach/perspective. This creates a research vacuum in the literature and it is this vacuum that the present study intends to fill. This study is therefore a comparative study of Generic Structural Elements in Research Article Abstracts of Selected Arts-Based Disciplines. This is done with a view to determining the generic structural variations across the disciplines in the arts.

For data, three hundred abstracts, 100 from each group, were purposively selected from 27 journals in Languages and Communication (LC), 13 in Literary and Creative Arts (LCA) and 25 in Cultural Studies and Philosophy (CSP) published between 2001 and 2010. The journals selected are domiciled in universities in the inner circle (countries where English is spoken as mother tongue). The e-technology which unprecedentedly provided global visibility in the new millennium motivated the choice of period while that of countries was necessitated by the larger concentration of global arts research in these countries. In this study, we have chosen to carry out a comparative study of generic structural elements in research article abstracts

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of Languages and Communication (LC), Literary and Creative Arts (LCA) and Cultural Studies and Philosophy (CSP). These were comparatively analysed using insights from generic structural potential analytical tools of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). This study is significant in a number of ways. First, given that the study is a novel one, it would enhance a better understanding of the genre structure of the selected disciplines. It would extend frontier of knowledge on comparative genre analysis of research discourse in general and research article abstracts in particular which has not been much explored in linguistic scholarship. It will also serve as useful material for academic discourse pedagogy and skills.

II. Theoretical Framework

In this study, we have found the Generic Structural Potential (GSP) theory of Systemic Functional Grammar relevant to our analysis. It is therefore reviewed thus.

Generic Structure Potential (GSP)

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a theory of language that adopts a sociological and functional-based approach to language study. Considering the sociological and functional interest of systemic grammar, its major concerns, as noted by Berry (1977:1), are perhaps *behaviour, function* and *situation.* Systemic functional grammar considers (views) language as a form of behaviour which is functional, as something that we do with a purpose or more. This implies that language use is goal directed. Besides, systemic grammar is also interested in language as social semiotics – how people use language with each other in accomplishing everyday social life (Halliday 1978 quoted in Eggins 2004:3). This interest, as noted by Eggins (op.cit), leads systemic linguists to advance four main theoretical claims about language. These are (i) language use is functional; (ii) its function is to make meanings; (iii) These meanings are influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they are exchanged and (iv) The process of using language is a semiotic process, a process of making meanings by choosing. Eggins (2004:3) has summarized these theoretical claims by describing the systemic grammatical approach as a *functional-semantic approach to language.*

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is composed of several branches namely; the concept of language, metafunction, text and context, genre analysis and generic structure potential and finally, its linguistic components. For the purpose of the present study, we shall focus on genre analysis, generic structure potential and linguistic components of SFG. On linguistic components, our emphasis shall be on mood and modality. These are discussed in turn.

a) Genre Analysis and Generic Structural Potential

i. *Context of Situation*

Context of situation is the immediate environment in which meanings are being exchanged – the environment in which a text is actually functioning (cf. Halliday and Hasan 1991:46; Ansari and Babaii 2004:6). As noted by Adegbite (2000:66), the immediate or 'context of situation' (Malinowski,1923; Firth,1962) specifies the component which describes the specific circumstances in which communication takes place pertaining to times, place, events, and other conditions. The components/features of context of situation have been presented in various ways by linguists (e.g. see Firth, 1962; Hymes, 1962, Halliday 1978; Ellis, 1988, Halliday and Hasan 1991 etc.). From a systemic functional grammatical perspective, for example, Halliday (1978) and Halliday and Hasan (1991) have identified three components or features of context of situation corresponding to three metafunctions. These are field of discourse, tenor of discourse and mode of discourse (For details, see Halliday and Hasan op.cit.). These three features of context of situation (CS) help us to interpret the social context of a text, i.e., the environment in which meanings are being exchanged.

Besides, Halliday and Hasan (op.cit.) have also introduced an additional concept called Contextual Configuration (CC). Contextual configuration is an account of the significant attributes of a social activity. In a more specific way, each of the three features of the context of situation (CS) namely; field, tenor and mode, as noted by Ansari and Babaii (2004:6), may be considered as a variable (factor) that is represented by some specific value(s). Each variable is said to function as an entry point to any situation as a set of possibilities and/or options. Therefore, the variable 'field' may have the value 'praising' or 'blaming'; Tenor may allow a choice between 'parent-to-child' or 'employer-to-employee' while 'Mode' might be 'speech' or 'writing' (Ansari and Babaii op.cit.). A Contextual Configuration is therefore, a specific set of values that realizes field, tenor, and mode (Halliday and Hasan 1991:55; Ansari and Babaii 2004:4). Contextual Configuration (CC) plays a central role in the structural unity of the text. Halliday and Hasan (ibid:56) point out that ''If text can be described as language doing some job in some context, then it is reasonable to describe it as the verbal expression of a social activity.'' The Contextual Configuration (CC) is an account of the significant attributes of this social activity. Therefore, the features of the CC can be used for making certain kinds of predictions about text structure. These predictions, as identified by Halliday and Hasan (op.cit.), are as follows:(i) What elements must occur; (ii) What elements can occur; (iii)Where must they occur; (iv) Where can they occur; and(v) How often can they occur. In short, a contextual configuration (CC) can predict the *obligatory*

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and the *optional* elements of a text's structure as well as their *sequence* in relation to each other and the possibility of their *ITERATION*.

ii. *Context of Culture*

Halliday and Hasan (1991:46) describe *context of culture* as a broader background against which the text has to be interpreted. They note further that any actual context of situation, the particular configuration of field, tenor and mode that has brought a text into being, is not just a random jumble of features but a totality of a package … of things that typically go together in the culture. Context of culture, which encompasses and/or specifies the conventional or socio-cultural rules guiding people's use of language, largely determines the text's interpretation because it assists in the predictability of the text from the context (cf. Halliday and Hasan ibid: 47; Adegbite 2005:54).

From a Systemic Functional Grammatical (SFG) perspective, context of culture determines the structural pattern of text production because it specifies the 'cultural purpose' of the text – what a particular text is doing with language. When we state the purpose that a text fulfils, we are stating what kind of job the text does in its culture of origin (cf. Eggins 2004:55). Identifying the purpose of a text is said to have potency of giving readers clues on how to read and therefore interpret the (sometimes indeterminate) meanings of the text. When we do this, we are recognizing the *genre* of the text (Eggins op.cit.).

b) Genre and Genre Analysis

Quite a number of definitions of genre have been given in the literature (e.g. see Miller 1984; Martin 1984; 1985; Martin, Christie and Rothery 1987; Swales 1990; Thompson 1994; Hyons 1996; Eggins 2004 etc.). Swales' (1990) definition of genre shall be taken as our guide. For Swales (1990), genre is composed of "communicative events, whose structure and context are shaped by the purpose of the discourse community in which the genre is situated." In other words, the communicative purpose of a particular genre, which is recognized by the experts of that field, determines what occurs or does not occur in the textual realization of the genre. This implies that a genre is not only determined by its formal features/properties but more largely by the communicative purpose it is designed to serve within a particular culture or discourse community. In the Systemic Functional Grammatical (SFG) approach to genre, different genres are different ways of using language to achieve different culturally established tasks, and texts of different genres are texts which are achieving different purposes in the culture. Therefore, a text's genre is said to be identified by the sequence of functionally different stages or steps through which it unfolds (Ansari and Babaii 2004:5). The major reflex of differences in genres is the staging structure of texts. These niceties, as noted by Ansari and Babaii (op.cit.), are often captured with reference to the Context of Culture (CC) in which the texts are produced.

Genre analysis in the literature has been approached from two perspectives namely; the move analytic approach, proposed by Swales (1981, 1990) and the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) – analytic approach based in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). For the purpose of the present study, we shall adopt the GSP analytic procedure. We therefore attempt a more detailed discussion of the GSP below.

The Generic Structure Potential (GSP) analytic approach has Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) as its theoretical foundation. The interest in the generic (or schematic) structure of texts has been greatly influenced by Halliday & Hasan 1985; Hasan 1978, 1984, 1996; and Martin 1992). Among the concepts favoured/ privileged in SFG are text and context. From these, both the text structure and contextual configuration (CC) are strongly implicated in the GSP – analytical approach. Contextual configuration blends together the values of the three socio-semantic variables of field, tenor and mode to make statements about the structure of a given text and about the social context that generates it. The Contextual Configuration (CC) can predict the following elements of the structure of a text; the obligatory and the optional elements together with the sequencing of these elements. Given the CC of any text, one should be able to generate the potential structure of such text. The potential global rhetorical pattern is what is known as *GSP*. GSP has been described as a condensed statement of the conditions that locate a text within a particular Contextual Configuration (CC).

Structure Potential (SP) or Generic Structure Potential (GSP) of a text refers to the total range of optional and obligatory elements of the text and their order (Halliday and Hasan 1991:64). Two or more texts that share the same set of obligatory and optional elements and that are embedded in the same contextual configuration (CC) belong to the same genre or are texts of the same genre (cf. Halliday and Hasan op.cit.). When two texts are closely related to the extent that language is doing the same kind of job in both, they are embedded in the same Contextual Configuration (CC). Two or more texts that are embedded in the same Contextual Configuration (CC) – belong to the same genre may have some differences. These differences, as noted by Halliday and Hasan (op.cit.), are those that do not alter the kind of job that language is doing in the two. To illustrate the above explication, Halliday and Hasan (ibid: 63-65) examine a set of similar spoken texts. They thereafter identify their obligatory and optional rhetorical elements of texts, and establish what they call the GSP of the genre, "Service Encounter" that of a "Shop Transaction" as:

[(G). (SI) ^] [(SE.) {SR^SC^}^S] P^PC (^F)

(Culled from Halliday and Hassan 1991:64)

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A GSP of this type is described as a summarized statement of the conditions under which a text will be seen as one that is appropriate to a Contextual Configuration (CC) of the Service Encounter. Simply put, it is suggested that any shop transaction in English potentially consists of the following macro-structural elements: (i) Greeting (G), (ii) Sale Initiation (S.I), (iii) Sale Enquiry (SE), (iv) Sale Request (SR), (v) Sale Compliance (SC), (vi) Sale (S), (vii) Purchase (P) (viii) Purchase Closure (PC) and (ix) Finis (F).

In the above GSP, there are labels for structures and the caret sign indicating sequence. The round brackets in the above GSP indicate optionality of enclosed elements. Therefore, G, SI, SE, and F are optional and SR, SC, S, P and PC are *obligatory*. The dot (.) between elements indicates more than one option in sequence. Halliday and Hassan (op.cit.) point out, however, that optionality of sequence is never equal to complete freedom; the restraint is said to be indicated by the square bracket. Therefore, for example, we can read the first square bracket as follows:

G and/or SI may/may not occur;
If they both occur, then either G may precede SI, or follow it;
Neither G nor SI can follow the elements to the right of SI.

The curved arrow shows *iteration*. Thus, (SE.) indicates: SE is optional; SE can occur anywhere, so long as it does not precede G or SI and so long as it does not follow P or PC or F; SE can be iterative. The braces with a curved arrow indicate that the degree of iteration for elements in the square brackets is equal. This means that if SR occurs twice, then SC must also occur twice. Finally, the caret sign (^) shows sequence.

III. Comparative Distribution and Analysis of Generic Structural Elements in Selected Arts-Based the Disciplines

As we have already stated in the methodology section of this study, our data were collected from learned journals from thirteen (13) disciplines in the arts. These are Linguistics, Communication, Classics, Performing Arts (including musics), Fine Arts, Visual Arts, Literature, Area Studies, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Religion, Philosophy and History. For the purpose of the present study, these are broadly categorised into three major categories of disciplines based on the relationship among the disciplines. These are Languages and Communication (Linguistics, Communication and Classics), Literary and Creative Arts (Performing Arts (including musics), Fine Arts, Visual Arts and Literature), and Cultural Studies and Philosophy (Area Studies, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Religion, Philosophy, and History). Generic Structural Elements that are found to characterise the three arts-based disciplines are discussed comparatively across the disciplines as follow.

IV. Generic Structural Elements in the Three Arts-Based Disciplines

Our findings reveal that among the eight generic structural elements or stages that are found to characterize the research article abstracts, not all of them have equal representation in the three broad arts-based disciplines. As the data reveal, Background Information, Problem Statement, Statement of Objectives, Findings and Conclusion are observed or found to cut across abstracts from the three categories of arts-based disciplines of Languages and Communication (LC), Literary and Creative Arts (LCA) and Cultural Studies and Philosophy (CSP). Among these five generic structural elements, only the Statement of Objectives and Findings are found to be obligatory structural elements and these, among others, define the structure of arts-based research article abstracts most especially in the three arts-based disciplines. Below are instances of abstracts that contain both the statement of objectives and findings in the three arts-based disciplines. We first of all instantiate statement of objectives and these instances are provided below.

Ex. 1:

> *…This study aims to investigate the effect of female freshman student enrolment figures in EFL programs on student achievement and attitudes, program staffing, classroom, management, assessment, resources and facilities utilization on the basis of…. .* (Our emphasis)

Source: Journal of Applied Linguistics, Vol. 8, Issue 4, 2006

The extract above is an example of statement of objective in the field of languages and communication that is stating the analytical goal of the research conducted.

Ex. 2:

> *…This article assesses the methodology, constraints and, most importantly, the gendered opportunity structures surrounding* the women's peace movement in Casamance.

Source: Canadian Journal of African Studies

The extract above is an instance of the statement of objectives that expresses the analytical scope of the research.

Ex. 3:

> *… The object of this essay is to put the debate in a new light…It does so by proposing a mathematical characterization of Emptiness that is, the totality of empty things…* (Our emphasis)

Source: Philosophy East and West, Vol. 59, No.4 Oct. 2009

The extract 3. above is an instance of objective statement that expresses or states the research goal or purpose.

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Examples 1-3 above instantiate statement of objectives that are used to state analytical goal, analytical scope and research goal respectively within the three arts-based disciplines of Language and Communication (LC), Literary and Creative Arts (LCA) and Cultural Studies and Philosophy (CSP). The preponderance of Statement of Objectives (SO) in the abstracts from these three disciplines has some implications. First, within the academic discourse community of LC, LCA and CSP, inclusion of SO in research article abstracts is considered highly important and obligatory. Second, young or novice entrants into these academic discourse communities should train themselves on how to design achievable research of objectives for their researches. While emphasising the importance of Statement of Objectives (SO) in research discourse, Hunston (1993) reviewed in Cava (2010:32) notes that in academic writing, "the author presents him/herself as a researcher working towards the achievement of specific research goals…"

Findings of the study are also found to cut across the abstracts from the three arts-based disciplines. Below is an instance of abstracts from Journal of Communication Studies that contains the finding of the study.

Ex. 4:

> …using the most different system design, *the content analysis reveals significant differences between the two countries across a number of important variables: amount of domestic vs. foreign news coverage…* (Our emphasis)

Source: Sage Journal of Communication Studies

In example (4) above, the verb, 'reveals' clearly and vividly portrays the results or outcomes of the research efforts. Other instances of these are abound in the data. Background Information, Problem Statement and Conclusion are however found to be optional.

Besides, our findings reveal further that Analytical Framework (AF) is found to characterise the research article abstracts in LC but conspicuously absent in LCA and CSP. This implies that scholars within the academic discourse community of Languages and Communication (LC) places high premium on stating analytical framework in their research article abstracts. This is quite unlike scholars in the fields of LCA and CSP that consider analytical framework as relatively optional and, to a considerable extent, unimportant in writing their research abstracts except if it is required by the in-house style of a particular journal. Analytical framework (AF) generally spells out the procedure(s) for data analysis. They are used in achieving two generic compliant functions in research article abstracts in the arts-based disciplines. They are used in stating analytical framework and how the theory embraced in a particular study is applied. Below is an instance of abstracts that contain Analytical Framework (AF) in the fields of Languages and Communication (LC).

Ex. 5:

> *…The study adopted an ex-post facto research design while the instruments used included self-designed observation schedule, designed to determine the extent to which different language related episodes occurred in the language classroom and a verbal ability test. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data for the study.* (Our emphasis)

Source: Marang: Journal of Languages and Literature, Vol. 20, 2010

In the above example, the analytical framework is embedded in the methodology segment of the abstract. Both the research design, and the analytical 1procedure are clearly stated.

Besides, although methodology is one of the obligatory generic structural elements in arts-based disciplines generally, as our data reveal, methodology is found to characterise research article abstracts from the fields of LC and CSP but absent in the fields of LCA. This implies that the journals published in the fields of Literary and Creative Arts (LCA) do not consider the inclusion of methodology in arts-based research article abstracts as prerequisite for the publication of articles. As pointed out in the literature on structure of academic discourses, methodology or simply methods in academic discourse generally and in research article abstracts in particular are/is used to provide information on research design, procedures, assumptions, approach, data collection procedures etc. (cf. Hyland, 2000; Feltrim 2003 et al etc.). Besides, the methodology or methods section describes the steps followed in the execution of the study and also provides a brief justification for the research methods used (Perry et al, 2003:661). We can consider the examples of methodology as we have in abstracts from the fields of LC and CSP.

Ex. 6:

> *…This article uses four underground community radio stations as a case study to explore the emergence of alternative radio and to examine the processes of its transformation and disintegration*. The original empirical research reported in this article is mainly based on the fieldwork data collected by a variety of methods between June and August 1998. (Our emphasis)

Source: Journal of Communication Inquiry, Vol.24, No. 4, 2001

Ex. 7:

> … Our study explored experiences of widowhood in Kampala. *Ethnographic fieldwork combined with participant observation, semi-structured individual interviews, and focus group discussions.* Widows are heterogeneous….(Our emphasis)

Source: Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 43, No.1, 2009

In examples 6 and 7 above, the methodologies adopted in the researches conducted in two fields of knowledge in arts-based disciplines are clearly stated.

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Finally, theoretical Framework is found to characterize abstracts from LC and CSP but absent in abstracts from LCA. Theoretical Framework (TF) discusses or describes the basic principles, concepts or models on which a particular research work (in a particular field) is based. For effective academic writing to be achieved, authors of academic articles are expected to position their ideas within a broad context of related frameworks and theories. (cf. Michael Durrentl 2009:1). Below is an instance of the theoretical framework that is used in performing the generic compliant function of presenting the theoretical model employed or adopted in the study.

Ex. 8:

> *…Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics Appraisal Theory, in particular its system of attitude,* this article examines a set of authentic job interviews in French, or French and English… (Our Emphasis)

Source: Novitas-Royal: Research on Youth and Language Vol.3 (1) 2009

V. Conclusion

The foregoing is a comparative study of Generic Structural Elements in Research Article Abstracts of Selected Arts-Based Disciplines. Our findings generally reveal that: (i) Among the eight generic structural elements or stages that are found to characterize the research article abstracts, not all of them have equal representation in the three broad arts-based disciplines of LC, LCA CSP and; (ii) Background Information, Problem Statement, Statement of Objectives, Findings and Conclusion are observed or found to cut across abstracts from the three categories of arts-based disciplines of Languages and Communication (LC), Literary and Creative Arts (LCA) and Cultural Studies and Philosophy (CSP). Among these five generic structural elements, only the Statement of Objectives and Findings are found to be obligatory structural elements and these, among others, define the structure of arts-based research article abstracts most especially in the three arts-based disciplines; (iii) Analytical Framework (AF) is found to characterise the research article abstracts in LC but conspicuously absent in LCA and CSP; (iv) Methodology is found to characterise research article abstracts from the fields of LC and CSP but absent in the fields of LCA and finally, theoretical Framework is found to characterize abstracts from LC and CSP but absent in abstracts from LCA.

This study concludes therefore that a comparative exploration of generic structural elements in selected arts-based disciplines has, among others, potency of enhancing a better understanding of the genre structure of the selected disciplines. It would extend frontier of knowledge on comparative genre analysis of research discourse in general and research article abstracts in particular which has not been much explored in linguistic scholarship. It will also serve as useful material for academic discourse pedagogy and skills. This study has also contributed to knowledge by establishing the distinctiveness of the generic structural elements of the three broad arts-based disciplines of LC, LCA and CSP and their representations across the disciplines. Based on this, this study therefore recommends that a comparative study of generic structural elements of research article abstracts in other fields of human endeavours be carried out. This would assist future researchers in determining representation of these generic structural elements in other fields that may be chosen.

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