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**RHETORICAL MOVES OF THE ABSTRACT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS’ TERM PAPERS: PROPOSING A MODEL**

**MOVIDAS RETÓRICAS DEL RESUMEN EN TRABAJOS DE CURSO DE ESTUDIANTES DE LENGUA INGLESA: PROPUESTA DE UN MODELO**

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***Abstract:***

* **Problem to deal with:** An abstract functions as an attention-grabber since it briefly outlines all the parts of a paper. It has been observed that third-year students of the degree course English Language with A Second Foreign Language at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV) show some inconsistencies in organizing ideas of the Abstract in term papers they should submit for the subject *Investigación.*
* **Aims:** The purpose of the study herein reported was to create a model describing the rhetorical moves and most recurrent phrases characterizing the Abstract of term papers.
* **Methodology:** A mixed-method approach was adopted. The sample consisted of twenty-one students and a corpus of ten term paper abstracts written by third-year students between 2020 and 2023.
* **Results and Discussion:** The diagnostic phase highlighted the need to develop a resource for improving students' abilities in crafting the Abstract of term papers. Thus, the authors engaged in designing a model that outlined the rhetorical organization and frequently used expressions of the Abstract of term papers. This design encompassed four stages: (1) corpus compilation, (2) corpus tagging, (3) corpus processing, and (4) move analysis of the Abstract of term papers.
* **Conclusions:** The model designed could help students better organize their ideas in the Abstract of term papers. Moreover, professors can benefit as they are provided with a framework for teaching academic writing and guiding students in the writing of effective abstracts**.**

**Resumen:**

* **Problemática:** Un resumen funciona como un elemento que capta la atención, pues describe brevemente todas las partes de un trabajo. Se ha observado que los estudiantes de tercer año de la carrera Lengua Inglesa con Segunda Lengua Extranjera de la Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV) presentan algunas inconsistencias al organizar las ideas del resumen en los trabajos de curso que deben entregar para la asignatura Investigación.
* **Objetivos:** El propósito del estudio fue crear un modelo que describiera las movidas retóricas y las frases más recurrentes que caracterizan los resúmenes de trabajos de curso.
* **Metodología:** Se adoptó un enfoque de método mixto. La muestra incluyó veintiún estudiantes y un corpus de diez resúmenes de trabajos de curso de estudiantes de tercer año entre 2020 y 2023.
* **Resultados y discusión:** El diagnóstico destacó la necesidad de elaborar un recurso para mejorar la redacción de resúmenes de trabajos de curso por los estudiantes. En consecuencia, las autoras diseñaron un modelo que describiera la organización retórica y las expresiones más utilizadas en los resúmenes de trabajos de curso. Este diseño comprendió cuatro etapas: (1) compilación del corpus, (2) etiquetado del corpus, (3) procesamiento del corpus y (4) análisis de las movidas del resumen de trabajos de curso.
* **Conclusiones:** El modelo podría ayudar a los estudiantes a organizar mejor sus ideas en los resúmenes de trabajos de curso. Además, a los profesores se les proporciona un marco para enseñar redacción académica y guiar a los estudiantes en la redacción de resúmenes efectivos.

**KEY WORDS:** Abstract, Term paper, Writing

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Resumen, Trabajo de curso, Redacción

**1. Introduction**

Writing, as an important academic activity, imposes a great challenge for writers, especially for novice student writers. The challenge is even enhanced when students write in English as a foreign language, as they not only have to appropriate themselves to the disciplinary discourses but also to do it in a language whose rhetorical convention is quite often different from that of their mother tongue.

According to Alfaki (2015), writing is one of the most important language skills; it plays an important role in expressing one's ideas, thoughts, opinions and attitudes. Through writing, people are able to share ideas and feelings, persuade and convince others. People may write for personal enjoyment or for other purposes. They may address an audience of one or more people and the audience can be known or unknown (Alfaki, 2015).

Additionally, by helping individuals comprehend problems and communicate solutions, writing helps to foster critical thinking. Because effective writing requires arranging thoughts coherently, it also encourages the organization of ideas (Collegnep, 2025).

In academic contexts, writing is a great challenge because it involves assessing, understanding and demonstrating mastery of specific disciplinary skills such as critical thinking, interpretation and presentation. It is not simply a matter of putting words on paper; it is a way to order, analyze, apply, and synthesize information in the most nuanced and sophisticated way (Mintz, 2021).

According to Sheldon Smith (2022), academic writing is the act of communicating concepts, data and research to a wider academic audience. It is divided into two main types: student academic writing, which is used for assessment purposes in universities and schools to prepare students for higher education, and expert academic writing, which is intended for publication in academic journals or books. Both styles are held to the same standards, which is a challenge for students to grasp (Sheldon Smith, 2022).

Precisely, producing a term paper at the end of a period or semester is one of the major challenges in academic writing that students usually face at the tertiary level. Term papers resemble discussions, scientific reports, reflective essays, or even research papers; they are characterized by in-depth exploration of a specific subject matter (Al-Tameemi et. al., 2023). Usually, term papers include an abstract, introduction, methods, results and discussion, conclusion, and recommendations (Paltridge, 2002).

An abstract is a well-developed single paragraph which is approximately 250 words in length. It outlines all the parts of the paper briefly and it is placed in the beginning of the research paper immediately after the research title (Sirisilla, 2023). Since the abstract also serves as an initial summary of the study, readers can refer to the abstract to assess their interest in reading the full report.

Students of the English Language with A Second Foreign Language Degree Course at Universidad Central ¨Marta Abreu¨ de Las Villas UCLV are required to submit a term paper for the subject Investigación that they take in their third academic year. One of the sections of this term paper is the Abstract. However, it has been noted that some students encounter difficulties in effectively organizing their ideas within this section and the use of some phrases characterizing it.

In the present paper, the authors report a study whose purpose was to create a model describing the rhetorical moves and most recurrent phrases characterizing the Abstract of term papers for the English Language with A Second Foreign Language Degree Course at UCLV.

**2. Methodology**

The methodology of the present study held to a mixed-method approach because data was collected, analyzed, and processed by mixing data both quantitatively and qualitatively, with the aim of providing a more comprehensive analysis of the situation and the research problem (Creswell, 2018).

The study herein presented was conducted at Universidad Central “Marta Abreu” de Las Villas, at the School of Humanities. Its purpose was to create a model describing the rhetorical moves and most recurrent phrases characterizing the Abstract of term papers for the English Language with A Second Foreign Language Degree Course at UCLV.

The whole research process comprised three (3) main stages:

First stage: bibliographic review in order to construct a theoretical framework to systematize the main concepts associated with the topic of research and their relationships. Therefore, concepts such as academic writing, genre, genre analysis, corpus, and corpus linguistics were thoroughly processed and analyzed.

Second stage: identification of the rhetorical moves and most recurrent phrases used in the Abstract of term papers for the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course at UCLV. Thus, ten (10) term papers written in English were compiled and processed.

Third stage: design of a model describing the rhetorical structure and the most recurrent phrases characterizing the Abstract of term papers.

In the research herein reported some methods were applied:

Theoretical Methods: historical and logical, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, structural and systemic. These methods helped in the systematization of the main concepts associated with the topic of research and their relationships.

Empirical methods:

Content analysis: to determine the characteristics and identify the moves and the most recurrent phrases of the Abstract of term papers

Corpus linguistics: to determine the moves and linguistic elements included in the model design.

Participant observation: to gain a closer insight into students’ practices with respect to academic writing

Survey: to explore students’ perceptions concerning the rhetorical structure and the most recurrent phrases characterizing the Abstract of term papers.

Statistical and mathematical methods: percentage analysis for processing the data from the survey.

The sample consisted of twenty-one (21) students and a corpus of ten (10) term paper abstracts written by third-year students between 2020 and 2023. The authors took into account these criteria for choosing the sample:

For students:

• Academic year: Third-year students are required to write and present a term paper for the subject Investigación where they should demonstrate they have become skillful in their English academic writing.

• Willingness: All students were willing to participate due to the potential benefits for enhancing their academic writing skills in English.

For the corpus:

• Text type: Term papers

• Date of publication: Papers presented from 2020 to 2023.

• Size: A corpus of ten (10) abstracts of third-year term papers.

• Authorship: All texts were written by non-native third-year students of the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course at UCLV.

• Language: Texts written in English by non-native English Language students.

• Transmission mode: Written texts converted into .txt format.

**3. Results and Discussion**

Ten (10) third-year students of the academic year 2022 were provided with a survey through Google Forms in order to explore their perceptions about the rhetorical structure of the Abstract of term papers. The results from the survey are summarized below:

* 66.7% evaluated as “very important” the process of writing the Abstract of term papers.
* 47.6% attributed a medium level of complexity to the process of writing the Abstract of a term paper.
* 57.1% of the students stated that they were not familiar with the structure they should follow for writing the Abstract of term papers.
* All students (100 %) agreed that a model describing the rhetorical structure and the most recurrent phrases used in the Abstract of term papers could be a valuable resource for improving the quality and coherence of student’s writing.

The findings emphasized the need to develop a resource aimed at improving students' abilities in crafting the Abstract of term papers. In response, the authors of the present paper decided to create a model that outlines the rhetorical composition and frequently used expressions typical of the Abstract.

The design of the model consisted of four interrelated stages: (1) corpus compilation, (2) corpus tagging, (3) corpus processing, and (4) move analysis of the Abstract of term papers. These stages are explained in detail below.

*Corpus compilation*

A specialized corpus of 1588 words was compiled. All the texts were taken from authentic sources: ten third-year term papers were originally written in English by non-native English Language students. The date of publication ranged from 2020 to 2023. Once the corpus was compiled, all pdf documents were converted into Word format for the second stage (corpus tagging).

*Corpus tagging*

The approach suggested by Bhatia (1993) for move-based analysis was used for tagging the text segments in the corpus during the move identification process. Each text sample was assigned a code for the Abstract (e.g., A1… A10). Subsequently, the corpus tagging procedure started with the aim of recognizing the rhetorical organization defining the Abstract of the term papers.

*Corpus processing*

At this stage, the texts were converted into \*.txt files for analysis using AntConc 3.4.3 w 2014 to assess the frequency of linguistic elements, and AntMover 1.0 to identify the structure present in the abstracts following the approach suggested by Bathia (1993).

*Move analysis of term paper abstracts and most recurrent phrases*

Considering that the tagging process of the corpus was based on Bathia´s rhetorical model, it was concluded that the Abstract of term papers should comprise four moves: Move 1: Introducing the purpose (mandatory), Move 2: Describing the methodology (mandatory), Move 3: Summarizing the results (optional), and Move 4: Presenting the conclusions (mandatory).

After establishing the moves and some of the most recurrent phrases in the Abstract of the term papers, they were arranged in such a way that students could better organize their ideas in the Abstract and choose those phrases that better fit their purposes.

The table below shows the model proposed by the authors of the research herein reported. As can be seen, move 3 is optional, meaning that it can be taken into account, or not, when writing the Abstract. However, the rest of the moves are mandatory; i.e., they cannot be overlooked in the process.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Moves | Purpose | Phrases |
| Move 1: Introducing the purpose (Basic aim of the study) (mandatory) | - This move sets the context for the study, providing the reader with an initial understanding of what the study is about  - Then, the author should clearly state the purpose and objectives of the research. | *Therefore, the main objective of this term paper is to…*  *The present work is, therefore, devoted to…*  *Hence, the purpose of this term paper is to propose…*  *Therefore, the main goal of this term paper is to propose…* |
| Move 2: Describing the methodology (Procedure followed) (mandatory) | - In this move, researchers describe the methods and procedures used to conduct the study, including data collection methods, research design, sample selection, and data analysis techniques. | *In order to address this objective, several research methods are employed including…*  *It uses a qualitative research approach including some empirical methods to collect information.*  *To achieve this aim, a corpus of X term papers was compiled and analyzed.*  *Later, it is presented an analysis of the most recurrent linguistic features of each move and step in a X corpus, carried out with the aid of the software AntMover.* |
| Move 3: Summarizing the results (Summary of the main findings) (optional) | - This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of data collected.  - It is essential to highlight the most significant outcomes without going into too much detail. | *The evidence from this study suggests that ...*  *The results of this study indicate that ...*  *Taken together, these findings suggest a role for X in promoting Y.*  *Whilst this study did not confirm X, it did partially substantiate ...* |
| Move 4: Presenting the conclusions (Summary of the main conclusions) (mandatory) | - The conclusions presented in this section should directly address the purpose introduced at the beginning of the abstract.  - Any recommendations or suggestions for future research or practical applications can be provided. | *The study concluded…*  *Future research should focus on…*  *Addressing these challenges will present avenues for future research.*  *This study has practical applications for…* |

**4. Conclusions**

In this paper, the authors have given an account of a study conducted at the Universidad Central “Marta Abreu” of Las Villas (UCLV) with students of the degree course English Language with A Second Foreign Language. Its purpose was to create a model describing the rhetorical moves and most recurrent phrases characterizing the Abstract of term papers. The methodology implemented held to a mixed-method approach in which both quantitative and qualitative data were processed and analyzed. The created model consists of four moves with some corresponding phrases: Move 1: Introducing the purpose (mandatory), Move 2: Describing the methodology (mandatory), Move 3: Summarizing the results (optional), and Move 4: Presenting the conclusions (mandatory). Despite some limitations the study may have like sample size and disparities in writing styles, it represents a step forward towards the improvement of academic writing of both experienced and novice writers.

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