# 6th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF HUMANISTIC STUDIES (CIESHUM 2023)

## Improving the English Language Students' Writing Skills of Term Papers Through Rhetorical Moves Analysis

## *Mejora de las Habilidades de Escritura de los Trabajos de Curso de los Estudiantes de Lengua Inglesa Mediante el Análisis de Movidas Retóricas*

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*Abstract:*

- **Problem to deal with:** In academic contexts, writing has remained a great challenge for students, particularly the writing of term papers. Precisely, students of the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas show inconsistencies in the design and organization of their term papers in the subject Investigación, mainly in the organization and exposition of ideas in the Introduction.

- **Aims:** The purpose of this study is to design a model describing the rhetorical moves and most recurrent phrases characterizing the Introduction of term papers.

- **Methodology:** The methodology implemented held to a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data. The sample included ten students of the academic year 2022 and a corpus of fourteen term papers presented by fourth-year students between the years 2019 and 2022.

- **Results and Discussion:** The results of the diagnostic phase corroborated the necessity of creating a tool to enhance students' writing skills for writing the Introduction of their term papers. The design of a model describing the rhetorical structure and most recurrent phrases characterizing the Introduction of term papers comprised four stages: (1) corpus compilation, (2) corpus tagging, (3) corpus processing, and (4) move analysis of the Introduction of term papers.

- **Conclusions:** The model designed could be a step forward to help students better organize their ideas in the Introduction of term papers. Moreover, it can help improve the quality of the teaching and learning process of academic writing.

**Resumen:**

- **Problemática:** La redacción representa un reto para los estudiantes, particularmente la redacción de trabajos de investigación. Precisamente, los estudiantes de la carrera de Lengua Inglesa con Segunda Lengua Extranjera de la Universidad Central ¨Marta Abreu¨ de Las Villas muestran inconsistencias en el diseño y organización de la Introducción de sus trabajos de curso en la asignatura Investigación.

- **Objetivo(s):** El propósito de este trabajo es diseñar un modelo que describa las movidas retóricas y las frases más recurrentes que caracterizan la Introducción de los trabajos de curso.

- **Metodología:** La metodología aplicada tuvo un enfoque mixto, combinando datos cuantitativos y cualitativos. La muestra incluyó diez estudiantes del curso 2022 y un corpus de 14 trabajos de curso de estudiantes de cuarto año entre los años 2019 y 2022.

- **Resultados y discusión:** Los resultados del diagnóstico corroboraron la necesidad de crear una herramienta para mejorar las habilidades de los

estudiantes para la redacción de la Introducción de sus trabajos de curso. El diseño de un modelo que describiera la estructura retórica y las frases más recurrentes que caracterizan la Introducción de estos trabajos tuvo cuatro etapas: (1) recopilación del corpus, (2) etiquetado del corpus, (3) procesamiento del corpus y (4) análisis de las movidas en la Introducción.

- **Conclusiones:** El modelo diseñado podría ser un paso adelante para ayudar a los estudiantes a organizar la Introducción de los trabajos de curso. Además, podría ayudar a mejorar la calidad del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de la escritura académica.

**Keywords:** Introduction; Term paper; Writing

***Palabras Clave:*** *Introducción; Trabajo de curso; Redacción*

## 1. Introduction

In academic contexts, writing has remained a great challenge for academic writers, especially students. Furthermore, the use of English has increased the complexities of writing for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students (Fatma & Yağiz, 2020; Pasavoravate, 2011).

Academic writing refers to the particular rules that must be followed while writing academic texts. It is clear, concise, focused, structured and backed up by evidence (Hoshima & Hogue, 2007). In addition, according to Hartley (2008), "it is unnecessarily complicated, pompous, technical, authoritative, humorless, and elitist and excludes outsiders" (p.14). The term academic writing may be used to describe several types of texts, from undergraduate student's essays produced under examination conditions, to laboratory reports, and further to dissertation and theses (Orozco, L., 2021).

Precisely, the introductory section of a term paper refers to the information contained in the whole research report. It usually includes the topic of research, its importance, the research problem, the structure of the paper as well as the objectives and scope. This explains why the introduction is the most significant section (Ulil Fitriyah, 2020). In addition, the researcher should write well-structured paragraphs in such a way that they

attract the readers´ attention with respect to the topic so that they continue to read the whole text (Indrian and Ardi, 2019).

According to Swales and Feak (2004), students need to adhere to a widely used organizational rhetorical pattern when writing the introduction of their research papers for their readers to follow and understand them easily. Therefore, they proposed a rhetorical pattern for the introduction section referred to as the CARS (create-a-research-space) model consisting of three moves: move 1 (establishing a territory), move 2 (establishing a niche/context where a particular piece of research makes particular good sense), and move 3 (occupying the niche). A move is, according to these authors, "…a discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse" (p. 228).

Within the last two decades, genre and genre analysis have become a popular framework for analyzing the form and function of scientific discourse, as well as a helpful tool for developing educational practices in fields such as rhetoric, professional writing and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Martín, P., 2003).

As stated in both Curriculum D and Curriculum E of the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV), students should submit a term paper for the subject Investigación, one of the subjects of the discipline Práctica Laboral-investigativa (Curriculum D)/Práctica Pre-Profesional e Investigativa (Curriculum E). This term paper is the continuation of a research project that students are required to present as the final evaluation of the subject Metodología de la Investigación they take in the second academic year. Therefore, students should demonstrate they have acquired the necessary skills to conduct a research work on a given topic they choose from a set of topics provided by the Department of English Language. Also, students are assigned a supervisor who will guide them throughout the whole research process.

Since students of the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas mostly rely on the advisory provided by their supervisors, they show inconsistencies in the design and organization of their term papers in the subject Investigación, mainly in the organization and

exposition of ideas in the Introduction section. Therefore, the overall aim of this research is to design a model describing the rhetorical moves and the most recurrent phrases characterizing the Introduction section of term papers for the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course at UCLV.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology of the present research holds to a mixed-method approach because it focuses on collecting, analyzing, processing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data, with the aim of providing a more comprehensive analysis of the situation and the research problem. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell and Plano, 2011).

The research herein presented was conducted at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, at the School of Humanities at the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course. It was aimed at designing a model describing the rhetorical moves and the most recurrent phrases characterizing the Introduction section of term papers.

The whole research process consisted of 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 provided and analyzed.

Second stage: identification of the rhetorical moves and the most recurrent phrases used in the Introduction section of term papers for the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course at UCLV. Thus, fourteen (14) term papers written in English were compiled and processed.

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

In this research some methods were applied:

• Theoretical Methods

Historical and logical: to analyze the logical and historical development of the main theoretical foundations used as the basis for this research.

Analysis and synthesis: to analyze, evaluate and generalize the existing tendencies and the collected data for the purpose of this research.

Induction and deduction: to make deductions, analysis and abstractions which were subsequently used in the corpus analysis.

Structural and systemic: to guide the author in the whole research process and in the proposal from a logical and systematized view.

• Empirical methods

Traditional document analysis: A detailed textual and document analysis was carried out.

Content analysis: to determine the characteristics of the Introduction section of term papers as a genre and to identify the moves and the most recurrent phrases of the Introduction section 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 in the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course at UCLV.

Survey: to explore students' perceptions concerning the rhetorical structure and the most recurrent phrases characterizing the Introduction section of term papers.

The sample included ten (10) students of the academic year 2022 and a corpus comprising the Introduction section of fourteen (14) term papers presented by fourth-year students of the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas between the years 2019 and 2022.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Ten (10) fourth-year students of the academic year 2022 were provided with a survey whose purpose was to explore their perceptions concerning the rhetorical structure and the most recurrent phrases characterizing the Introduction section of term papers. The results from the survey are given below:

- The majority of the students (70%) evaluated as "very important" the process of writing the Introduction section of term papers.

- 60% of them attributed a high level of complexity to the process of writing the Introduction section of a term paper.

- 60% of the students stated that they were not familiar with the structure they should follow for writing the Introduction section of term papers.

- 80% of them did not know what a rhetorical move is.

- All students agreed that a model describing the rhetorical structure and the most recurrent phrases used in the Introduction section of term papers could be very useful. They said that it would be a great help to have a model to follow or to take ideas from to get the project started, since students often encounter problems introducing their ideas, and that students need to be familiar with all kind of elements and methods that can help them while writing the Introduction section of their term papers.

The results of the diagnosis phase corroborated the necessity of creating a tool intended to enhance the students' academic writing skills for writing the Introduction section of term papers.

The design of a model describing the rhetorical structure and the most recurrent phrases characterizing the Introduction section of term papers consisted of four interrelated stages: (1) corpus compilation, (2) corpus tagging, (3) corpus processing, and (4) move analysis of the Introduction section. These stages are explained in detail below.

Corpus compilation

A specialized corpus was compiled for this research. Furthermore, the corpus achieves the notion of balance, and regarding size the specialized corpus selected consists of 19 074 words.

Other elements were also considered for the elaboration of the corpus. For instance, all the texts were taken from authentic sources; these were fourteen (14) fourth-year term papers. Moreover, all texts were originally written in English by non-native English Language students. In the case of the date of publication, this ranged from 2019 to 2022.

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Once the corpus was compiled, all pdf documents were converted into Word format for the tagging stage.

Corpus tagging

For this study, the move-based analysis model proposed by Swales (2004) was followed for tagging the textual fragments of the corpus when searching for moves. After having selected the rhetorical model for conducting the corpus analysis, the next step was setting a code for each of the text samples for the Introduction section (e.g. I1…I14). Afterwards, the process of corpus tagging started with the purpose of identifying the rhetorical structure characterizing the Introduction section of the term papers.

Corpus processing

After being coded, the texts were saved as *.txt files in order to be processed with AntConc 3.4.3 w 2014 to analyze the frequency of linguistic elements. This program was used because it has a freeware license and includes an easy-to-use, intuitive graphical user. It also offers a powerful concordancer, word and keyword frequency generators as well as tools for cluster and lexical bundle analysis and a word distributing plot (Anthony, 2005).

In the case of the Concordance tool, the program was very useful for identifying the most recurrent phrases of the identified moves in the coded Introduction sections, since it provided groups of words that surrounded a specific term, in order of frequency. Moreover, the Word List showed the words that appeared more frequently in the analyzed sections. Furthermore, the Word Clusters /NGrams presented the words that appeared together with more frequency.

Move analysis of the Introduction section of Term Papers

As previously mentioned, the tagging process of the fragments was carried out by considering Swales' rhetorical model. It was concluded that the Introduction section of term papers comprises three moves.

Move 1: Establishing the territory (the situation)

In this move, the researcher needs to show that the selected topic is still important, relevant, and worthy to be investigated.

Step 1: Explaining the extent to which the research is important, interesting or relevant.

- … the need to enhance the competence of the translators is imperious, since they are the bridge between the scientists and the readers. (I5)

- … identifying the most common moves of a scientific texts would be of great importance and aid for 4th year student of English with French as a second language. (I6)

Step 2: Providing background information

- Johnson P. (2010) also comments on the fact that the growing trend worldwide is oriented toward establishing stricter standards of writing proficiency … (I8)
- Listening has an important role in everyday life, when people are engaged in communication nine percent is spent to writing, 16 percent to reading, 30 percent to speaking, and 45 percent to listening (Hedge, 2000). (I11)

Move 2: Establishing a niche (the problem)

Step 1: Indicating a gap in previous literature

- Various researchers have investigated how women are represented in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, but it is noteworthy that little of them have paid attention to the lesser known tales, of which "Three Sundays in a Week" is an example. (I7)

Step 2: Identifying a problem or need

- … they have difficulty when expressing their views in academic writing or when analyzing or criticizing somebody else's opinions. (I4)

- Preparatory Course students of the degree course English Language with a Second Foreign Language at the Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las

Villas (UCLV) claim to have difficulties when using collocations in English properly. (I10)

Move 3: Occupying the niche (the solution)

Step 1: Outlining the purpose, aim, objective of the research

- To propose a set of activities to help first-year students … to enhance their writing skills using phrasal verbs. (I13)

- To propose set of tasks for assessing listening comprehension skills in English Language major students … (I11)

Step 2: Specifying the research question that was investigated

- How can intercultural competence be enhanced in the English Language students to prepare them for the internship period in Gaviota Tours Agency? (I3)

- How can students of the course English Language with Second Foreign Language (French) at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV) be trained in order to achieve an intercultural communicative competence for their professional life as translators or interpreters? (I9)

Step 3: Describing the methodology

- The research follows a general dialectical-materialistic method from which the theoretical, empirical and statistical and mathematical methods are derived. A mixmethod approach follows for which the quantitative and qualitative methods will be used. (I1)

- For the fulfillment of the previous objectives, the following methods were applied … (I12)

- In order to do a thorough study, a mix-method approach is appropriate, for which we used the quantitative and qualitative methods… (I14)

Step 4: Indicating the paper structure

- This paper is structured into two chapters. The first chapter is the Theoretical Framework of the research … The second chapter is devoted to the research process with the description of the methods … (I2)

- The term paper is structured into three chapters. The objective of Chapter I is to develop a framework … In part two, the focus is placed on defining intercultural competence as a key competence for professionals' training … The third section contextualizes the use of ICT in foreign language teaching. (I3)

After determining the moves and steps as well as the most recurrent phrases in the Introduction section of the term papers, they were organized in such a way that in the future students could better organize their ideas in the Introduction section of term papers and choose those phrases that better fit their purposes.

The table below is a sample of the model of the rhetorical structure and most recurrent phrases for the Introduction section of term papers.

| Moves and Purpose | Steps | Phrases |
|---|---|---|
| **Move 1: Establishing the territory (the situation)** -**to show that the selected topic is still important, relevant, and worthy to be investigated** | Step 1: Explaining the extent to which the research is important, interesting or relevant. | The need to enhance x is imperious… X would be of great importance… |
| | Step 2: Providing background information | X also comments on the fact that … |
| **Move 2: Establishing a niche (the problem)** -**to identify gap or problem** | Step 1: Indicating a gap in previous literature | Various researchers have investigated x … but little of them have paid attention to… |

| | Step 2: Identifying a problem or need | X have difficulty when … X claim to have difficulties … |
|---|---|---|
| **Move 3: Occupying the niche (the solution)** **-to state purpose and offer a solution** | Step 1: Outlining the purpose, aim, objective of the research | To propose … |
| | Step 2: Specifying the research question that was investigated | How can X be enhanced …? How can X be trained … ? |
| | Step 3: Describing the methodology | A mixmethod approach follows … … a mix-method approach is appropriate … |
| | Step 4: Indicating the paper structure | This paper is structured into two chapters … The term paper is structured into three chapters … |

## 4. Conclusions

This paper has given an account of a study conducted in the degree course English Language with a Second Foreign Language at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas whose purpose was to design a model describing the rhetorical moves and most recurrent phrases characterizing the Introduction section of term papers. The methodology implemented held to a mixed-method approach in which both quantitative and qualitative data were compiled and analyzed. The diagnostic stage corroborated the necessity of creating a tool intended to enhance the students' academic writing skills for writing the Introduction section of term papers. Therefore, the model designed could be

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a step forward to help students better organize their ideas in the Introduction section of term papers. Moreover, it can help improve the quality of the teaching and learning process of academic writing.

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