

BOOK REVIEW



INQUIRY INTO GENRE: THE CRAFT OF ABSTRACT

Marina Bondi and Rosa Lorés Sanz
(Eds.). ABSTRACTS IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE.
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The reviewed volume is, to my knowledge, the first extensive and focused collection of research on abstracts, one of the most concise and increasingly important genres in the academia. The volume complements the rapidly growing body of research into academic discourse by addressing three trending areas of contemporary research on research: cross-cultural aspects, cross-disciplinary variation and the diachronic perspective, thus clearly reflecting a keen scholarly interest of the last few decades in how the ‘big culture’ (national culture) and the ‘small culture’ (disciplinary culture) (Atkinson, 2004) shape and influence academic rhetoric.

Marina Bondi and Rosa Lorés Sanz open the book with an introductory section which provides a nutshell summary of the existing research on abstracts from each of the three perspectives and thus effectively set the scene for the contributions that follow. The first section of the volume consists of five contributions addressing cross-cultural issues in abstract writing. The section begins with Francisco Alonso-Almeida’s “Evidential and epistemic devices in English and Spanish medical, computing and legal scientific abstracts: A contrastive study”. Throughout his analysis, Alonso-Almeida offers a thoughtful consideration of the semantic-pragmatic properties of lexical devices and modal verbs which convey epistemic and evidential meanings. At times this preoccupation with semantic values of individual markers or groups of markers, however, seems

to background the cross-linguistic/cross-disciplinary comparisons that the author seeks to make. Despite this, the conclusion presents a clear cut evaluation of the rhetorical differences between two academic cultures with the tendency for English scholars to be more strategic in their employment of evidential and epistemic devices in comparison to Spanish researchers.

The second contribution by Ines Busch-Lauer describes various categories of abstracts and focuses on their disciplinary, cross-linguistic and intercultural aspects. The chapter provides a detailed overview of the studies on abstracts done in the past decade and thus can serve as a useful resource for those looking for specific empirical studies on this academic genre. The author also provides samples of abstracts in different disciplines which are accompanied by an extensive analysis. Having reviewed cross-linguistic and intercultural aspects of abstract writing, the author completes the chapter with concise step by step guidelines on how to teach abstract writing to L2E students.

Giuliana Diani's contribution "On English and Italian research article abstracts: Genre variation across cultures" fills in the gap for Italian academic discourse on the cross-linguistic map of academic rhetoric. Her paper provides a detailed comparison of moves in Italian and English research article abstracts in linguistics. The frequency distribution analysis is accompanied by observations on various lexical and rhetorical features typical of each of the moves, thus resulting in a complete schemata of the genre analysed. Diani concludes that even though the analysed Italian abstracts conform to the international conventions, they are rhetorically less complex than abstracts written in English.

Rosa Lorés Sanz also approaches the question of how local/national vs international culture variable influences rhetorical and lexicogrammatical features of research article abstracts in sociology. This chapter is distinct from the other contributions in that, alongside Spanish and English L1 abstracts, it also considers translations of Spanish abstracts into English. The analysis shows that Spanish researchers tend to produce less informative abstracts in English as L2 compared to their English native speaking colleagues, thus possibly failing to conform to the rhetorical expectations of the international readership. The use of lexicogrammatical features in Move 3 (Aims) suggests a more reader oriented text construction in the English abstracts as compared to a more impersonal tone of the Spanish abstracts written in Spanish. Lorés Sanz further notes that the translations into English reflect an attempt to adjust the translated text to the rhetorical requirements of English as the international language of science.

The final contribution in this section is "Gender and academicity: Insights from research article abstracts" by Andrzej Łyda and Krystyna Warchał. Though the title of the chapter might call into question its relationship to cultural variation, which is the focus of the first section of the volume, the analysis looks at the correlation of various variables (gender, L1/L2 status of the authors, profile of the journal, chronology) with regard to academic lexis and disciplinary terminology use in research article abstracts in linguistics. The authors suggest gender related

differences, but only in relationship with other parameters such as the native speaker status of the writer and journal readership.

The second section of the book covers features of abstracts in a range of disciplines (mathematics education, material sciences, applied linguistics, medicine, law, business, economics) as well as a range of genres. The first contribution by Geneviève Bordet is an attempt to define the link between a succession of moves and lexical reiterations as the key to a persuasive and powerful abstract in mathematics education and material science. In her insightful analysis of PhD thesis abstracts in L1 and L2 English, Bordet argues for the importance of collocational chains in projecting an authoritative academic voice in such a highly structured and concise genre as an abstract. Bordet's research suggests that collocational chains do reflect epistemological nature of disciplines as well as the capacity of the "would be insiders" of the discipline to construct field-specific discourse coherence.

In the second chapter of disciplinary variation section, Silvia Cavalieri is interested to find out whether there are any differences in the move structure and patterns of writer visibility between the abstracts of medicine and applied linguistics. Cavalieri suggests that by including the *situating research* move, researchers in medicine make more effort towards a promotional abstract than applied linguists. The distinctive feature of applied linguistics abstracts, on the other hand, is a more prominent use of verbs of saying, though preference goes to their attributive rather than averral use. The chapter provides numerous examples, especially of the illustration of lexical patterns of framing verbs. While this is generally a positive feature of an empirical article, the lack of discussion of as many as 21 example sentences in a row makes one wonder whether they should have appeared in the appendix rather than the main body of the article.

In an attempt to cover abstract structure from a variety of possible angles, Anna-Maria Hatzitheodorou blends four existing frameworks into one comprehensive model and looks at move patterns in research article abstracts in law and business. The quantitative analysis shows that abstracts of business research articles display a higher frequency of moves than abstracts in legal research journals. Hatzitheodorou proceeds to the qualitative analysis, where she analyses three abstracts in greater detail discussing separate moves and sub-moves as well as linguistic choices authors make to highlight the rhetorical nature of each move. The chapter concludes with what Hatzitheodorou calls "limitations", which could perhaps better be viewed as useful suggestions for further work.

In the next chapter Michele Sala presents a fine-grained analysis of two metadiscursive strategies – attribution and knowledge-thematizing – in research article abstracts in applied linguistics, economics, law and medicine. In his analysis, Sala cogently navigates the reader through various categories of linguistic resources that are used to attribute authorial responsibility and thematize knowledge in the analysed texts, at the same time drawing relevant comparisons

and insights as to how these resources reflect the epistemological nature of the disciplines under study and contribute to the persuasiveness of the texts.

Section two of the volume closes with Françoise Salager-Meyer, María Ángeles Alcaraz Ariza and Beverly Lewin's contribution. The study is a significant addition to academic discourse studies given the overall scarcity of research on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) discourse, which the authors investigate. In their analysis the authors examine the actual structure of 268 published abstracts of four genres (research papers, review articles, case reports and systematic reviews) and find out that it is the research paper that CAM journals and researchers focus on most. This is hardly surprising having in mind that the research article is claimed to be one of the key genres in many disciplinary fields (cf. Hyland, 2005: 89-90). Of note is an interesting though tentative observation of the authors that there is a direct correlation between the quality and prestige of the journal and the number of published structured abstracts it contains. The chapter concludes with useful advice and guidelines for CAM journal editors emphasizing the importance of structured abstracts.

The third section of the book contains three chapters, all with a diachronic perspective, thus giving grounds for exploring "historicity" of genre, i.e. how "genres evolve, spread and decline" (Swales, 2004: 63). In her contribution "Changing voices: Authorial voice in abstracts", Marina Bondi combines cross-disciplinary and diachronic perspectives to explore whether there has been a change in authorial self-representation in economics, history and linguistics over the past twenty years. Bondi examines a variety of authorial voice markers such as first person markers, contrastive connectors, evaluative adjectives, modal verbs, and finds interesting disciplinary trends in their distribution as well as a general increase in their use over time. The author explains this trend by the increasing awareness of the scholars of the importance of the abstracts and the need to emphasize novelty, significance and credibility of their research results in the increasingly competitive research world.

In the following chapter Paul Gillaerts looks at changes in metadiscourse use in linguistic article abstracts from *Applied Linguistics* within the span of twenty years. Density of metadiscourse items, their position in the abstracts and correlations with moves are the aspects of abstract writing that the study addresses. Gillaerts notes an increased use of interactive resources, a finding which he links to the evolution of an abstract into a mini article. The second insight is about the increase in the use of boosters and attitude markers. As Gillaerts suggests, this trend might signal growing persuasive intents of the writers.

The final contribution of section three is "Development of academic journal abstracts in relation to the demands of stakeholders" by Akiko Okamura and Philip Shaw. The study sets an ambitious goal to investigate the historical development of abstracts in three disciplines (economics, marketing and cell biology) over the span of forty years. Okamura and Shaw approach the cross-disciplinary, diachronic

analysis from an innovative and refreshing perspective: they take into consideration interests of three groups of involved stakeholders – researchers as authors, information scientists/librarians and journal editors/publishers. Okamura and Shaw's analysis of moves and linguistic features of the abstracts suggests that, despite complex demands of the stakeholders, many aspects of the abstracts have not changed over time.

The book closes with an afterword by John Swales; unsurprisingly, every chapter in the volume makes reference to at least one of the numerous works on genre by this scholar. Swales makes an interesting reference to several pioneering studies on abstracts dating back to 1972 and 1985. According to Swales, just as these studies give us a glimpse of the abstract in their respective decades, the volume under review captures and documents the features of the abstract of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Overall, the volume makes a substantial contribution to the rapidly growing body of cross-linguistic and cross-disciplinary research on academic discourse. Enriched with a diachronic perspective, it not only provides a kind of a blueprint of the contemporary abstract, but also enables us to glimpse at its changes over time. It must have been difficult for the editors of the book to assign one or the other study to one of the three perspectives explored in the volume, as many of the studies described employ a combined perspective. This only goes to prove the versatility and diversity of the genre under analysis.

With nearly 400 separate entries in the reference list, the bibliography of the volume provides a rich anthology both to the past studies of abstracts and to the related fields. A variety of methodological approaches, corpus design schemas and extended analysis of empirical examples provided in the volume would certainly be useful for scholars working in applied linguistics. The whole volume would equally be useful to scholars of different cultures and disciplines, particularly to those who aspire to produce effective, persuasive and reader-friendly research writing.

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