

STUDENTS' ACADEMIC DISCOURSE FOR PUBLICATION COMPETENCE AND THE REFLECTED IDENTITIES

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Abstract

One of the attempts to acquire an identity in the academic community is by participating in the field development by publishing research papers into reputable journals. However, it requires an adequate understanding of the academic discourse for publication. For this concern, the present study aims to investigate the master students' understanding of the term of academic discourse for publication by going through their rejected research articles and their identities reflected from those rejected manuscripts. A qualitative method was employed, the data were gathered through interview of four master students majoring in English Education and the stories are presented narratively. The results show how the students' lack of comprehension of the notion of academic discourse affects their identities as members of the academic community. Pedagogical implications of this study are intended for the master students as the manifestation for their upcoming article's writing and publication.

Keywords: academic discourse, academic identity, writing for publication, research article

Introduction

Due to the growing interest of international publication as the indication of quality and credibility of a certain higher education setting (Miller et al., 2011)^[1], universities all across the world are competing to increase their number of publication. On the other hand, writing a scientific paper is a part of professional practice, it gives a contribution to the practice of that particular discipline. One's professionalism is determined by his/her active participation in field development. However, writing a scientific paper for international publication can seem as a daunting process for those whose first languages are not English. It is challenging enough for the Anglophones, let alone the non-native speakers.

Essentially, writing does not only convey information to the readers, at the same time it conveys something about the author. There is a sense where the readers would catch different nuances when reading writings written by different writers. According to Işık-Taş (2018)^[2], writers develop their identity through making discursal choices that are available to them in their writings.

Concerning the term of writer identity, numerous research has often focused on the writer's linguistic choices on their text. For instance, Hyland (2002)^[3] examine the use of first person pronouns in which he suggests that the use of these pronouns is the most obvious way to reveal the writer's identity. Even though, the use of personal pronouns may the best for the authors to achieve the authoritative identity, yet, it is widely agreed that the use of these pronouns reflected too much subjectivity, thus, it is highly suggested to avoid the use of such pronouns in academic writing. It does not mean that the use of personal pronouns is completely banned in this field, however, for novice writers, it is better to avoid to employ these pronouns. In another study of Rahimivand and Kuhl (2014)^[4], where they investigate the use of metadiscourse markers to develop academic writer identity, they found that this linguistic feature plays an important role in the "discursal construction of identity in academic writing" (p. 1497).

Besides, the above concerns that the writers may build their desired identity through the linguistics choices they make in their texts, still these selections are not of that

without any restrictions. Unlike spoken discourse in which the speakers are equipped with a various number of linguistic choices, in written discourse there exist conventional sets which govern and restrict the linguistic choices as the writers organizing their research paper. Every discourse community possesses different conventional norms among its members. The discourse community as well determine the construction of the writer's identity while simultaneously put some limitations to these choices. As in academic discourse, in order to be perceived as an active and competent member, academic writers follow the norms and conventional rules adopted by the academic community.

Despite the fact that it is hard to state what is academic and what is not since academic style is different from one area to another (Swales & Feak, 1994)^[5], there is a common practice followed by most of the academic writers that is emphasizing on the avoidance of the subjectivity. In his study Hyland (2004)^[6] comes up with three keys of what academic writing basically looks like: high lexical density, high nominal style, and impersonal construction. Swales and Feak (2012)^[7] propose six “considerations in academic writing” (p. 3): audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation.

Earlier, in the case of academic text structure, Swales in his study (1990, 2004)^{[8][9]} develops his Creating a Research Space (CARS) model to investigate the generic move structures of Introduction section of an RA, where he proposes there main moves an RA's Introduction must have: (1) establishing a territory; (2) establishing a niche; and (3) occupying the niche. This model of Swales may contribute to help the writers to display their arguments through their writings in an explicit and assuring way. This theory is employed for this study to identify the students' understanding of the rhetorical structure of RA. As stated on the previous paragraph, one of the considerations in academic writing is the organization, hence, investigating this matter using the mentioned theory may give a clear view of

students' comprehension of the academic discourse for publication.

A number of research on this issue of rhetorical move structures on the Introduction section of research article has been performed, for instance, Swales & Najjar (1987)^[10], Samraj (2002, 2005)^{[11][12]}, Hirano (2009)^[13] and Mohsenzadeh (2013)^[14]. Another research on the case of the writer's identity development has as well been investigated by a few researchers, one of which is the study of Deng (2012)^[15] where he identifies the identity development of Chinese students in writing Discussion and Conclusion section of thesis. Thus by far, such research focusing on the case of Indonesian master students in the case of writing RA for publication and their identity development is yet rare to be found. With regard to the aforementioned explanations, this research aims to discover to the extent of which the students understand the concept of academic discourse for publication and what kind of identity they are trying to reflect in the process of composing and submitting their manuscripts. The results show how the understanding of academic discourse conventions impacts the success of writing RA for publication.

Methodology

1. Participants

The participants for the present study were four master students majoring in English Education who are recently taking their course while writing for their theses and RA in one of the universities in Indonesia. They referred here with the pseudonyms as Mei, Kris, Lea, and April. The participants all share the same obligation to publish a research article as one of the requirements for graduation. Besides, they all have the experience of writing, submitting, revising, resubmitting research paper, some even had one of their paper desk-rejection. Lastly, neither one of the participants has any published manuscript.

2. Data collection

The data collection included two parts: textual data and interview data. At first, an initial interview was carried out in selecting the participants of the study. Once the participants were selected, their RAs which have been submitted into a particular journal and asked to be revised or even rejected are taken as the textual data. The results of these documents analysis were used to compose the second interview questions. The questions were compiled mostly with respect to the notion of academic discourse. This second interview was conducted to reveal the students' cognition and awareness of the academic discourse conventions and the identity they built in writing and publishing the manuscripts.

3. Data analysis

Miles and Huberman (1984)^[16] interactive model was utilized to analyze the data. These manuscripts were analyzed separately and simultaneously in terms of their rhetorical moves and the linguistic feature choices. The CARS model of Swales (1990)^[8] was utilized to investigate the Introduction sections and for the Conclusion sections, the theory from Swales & Feak (2004)^[17] was used. Referring to the statement from Nwogu (1997)^[18] in which he argues that some information may be implied within a step or move using particular lexical items. Thus, the move or step as listed in Swales CARS model in the manuscripts were investigated by looking through certain lexical items that signal the specific message. For example:

[...] the researcher lifted two aims that are to explore the intonation patterns used in the Sesame Street's [...] [Mei]

The underlined phrase indicates the purpose of the study which is commonly placed in the Abstract and Introduction sections. This phrase gives a signal to the readers of what is going to be achieved in the research, it is indicated as the Move 3 Step 1a according to the CARS model. It is obviously

shown that the communicative purpose of the writers may be captured by looking at particular lexical items.

The linguistic features were as well analyzed in terms of tenses for each section and the use of personal pronouns. The identities reflected on the participants' manuscripts were analysed by connecting the research questions with the patterns regarding the academic identity illustrated in each text were coded. As qualitative research is prone to raise the writers' subjectivity, hence, some techniques were applied to ensure the credibility of the data. Hence, data triangulation and member checking were used to certify the trustworthiness of the data.

Findings and Discussions

The Results are divided into two parts. In the first section, the answers to interview questions regarding the participants' recognition of academic discourse are displayed. Whereas, the results in concern with the participants' academic identity are presented in the second section.

1. Students' understanding of academic discourse

a. Preparing the manuscript

When preparing the first draft of their submitted paper, neither of the participants did a journal search. Instead, three of them did the research according to their interest then composed the manuscripts, later on, did the journal searching which would match their research themes.

"I write the paper first then search for the journal" [Mei]

Meanwhile, one participant claimed that at first, she read a few related articles that are compliant with her interest, compared all the papers and try to look at the gap which exists between those prior research papers.

"First, I'm searching for some previous studies that related to the topic I like on the internet. Read those papers carefully, compare then looking for the research gap. Start to do the

research, write the manuscript, and finally, find a suitable journal to submit my paper.” [April]

Albeit the diversity of steps in writing the manuscript and submitting it into a journal in which may vary from one individual to another, it is, however, important to be investigated, for one's basic academic discourse competence may be inadvertently shown. That one participant who primarily read a few RAs to find the existing gap may have more advantage in the novelty of her work. To ensure that the research we are doing, the topic we bring up, the subjects we are studying, the research questions we are proposing are of those which have never been under research before in pivotal to avoid plagiarism.

b. RA generic rhetorical moves

As for the generic moves of RAs' sections, only one participant gave a positive response towards it. Since this issue seems to be leaning more towards the applied linguistic, whilst all the participants are from the educational background, thus, they show quite a little inadequate understanding with respect to this concern.

“Up till this degree of study, this is the first time I've heard about the concept of Rhetorical move structures of the research article.” [Kris]

The ignorance of this term resulted in the massive number of comments they received from the reviewers. Below is one excerpt, one of the participants got from the journal editor while asking for the manuscript revision.

“I would suggest to organize the formulation of the research problem, aim and goals in the frame of introductory part of the article.” [Editor Comment 1]

This comment emphasizes on the need to expose the aims and goals of the study which is in line with Move 3, Step 1A and Step 1B of Swales' CARS model. Move 1 Step 1A Outlining purposes, this step underlines the importance of presenting the objectives or goals of the research. On the other hand, Step

1B Announcing present research correspond to the previous step which means that the writers ought to proclaim what is the research going to accomplish, and what are the questions to be answered by the research. The frequencies of every move and step in the Introduction section of the investigated manuscripts are described in percentage on the following table 1.

Table 1.
 The frequency of rhetorical move structures of the Introductions

Move	1			2				3			
Step	1	2	3	1 a	1 b	1 c	1 d	1 a	1 b	2	3
Frequ ency (%)	2 4	1 9	3 0	-	5	-	3	9	7	3	-

The high frequency of the move 1 step 3 (Reviewing items of previous research) shows how the students view themselves as novice writers who need to emphasize on the previous related research as the supporting theories while at the same time to strengthen the topic they are discussing in their studies. Other steps of move 1 are also employed fairly often in the manuscripts, which explain how establishing a territory is considered as the most important move by the students. Stating how their research must be carried out by providing some important points that exist in the field and supporting it by several prior research.

On the other hand, move 2 (establishing a niche) found to be the least move applied in the texts. This move mainly used to indicate a gap by opposing a weakness of prior research in the same topic, by developing research question around the understudied subject, or by continuing what has been studied to expand or clarify the research question. English writers tend to use this negative evaluation to persuade the readers that there are some drawbacks on the previous related research.

However, the table shows none of the step 1a and 1c are found in the texts. This condition can be connected to the fact that all the respondents are Indonesian, they bring

with them Indonesian culture in the sense of respect in which pointing at another research's deficiency is seen as impolite and against the custom. A similar result was also found by Arsyad (2000)^[19] in his study where he purposed two possible reasons for this occurrence, first is that it is considered culturally indecorous in Indonesian context and Indonesian writers do not see the need to negatively evaluate other people's works (p. 184).

As for the move 3 (occupying the niche), mostly shown by a statement of the research aims. The common steps are step 1a (outlining purposes) and step 1b (announcing present research), using these two steps, the students outlining the purposes of their research and give a glimpse of what will be attained at the end of the study. None of the students employ the step 3 to demonstrate the structure of the text. These results of the move structures reveal the tendency of how the students present their research to the readers. They find it necessary to provide a proper amount of background information of what makes their research is significant to the field development, with the assistance and confirmation from previous related research and theories.

Moreover, the Conclusion section also receives a number of comments. One of the comments from the editor regarding the organization of the Conclusion section can be seen below.

"Conclusions should reflect the main aim and goals of the research." [Editor Comment 2]

To conceive on the aim of this comment, let's look at the Swales and Feak (2004)^[18] scheme for Discussion and Conclusion section, in which it must include five moves one of which is Move 1 background information. By presenting over the background information which reflects the research aims, it might help the readers to not turn back the pages onto where this information was stated, and ease them in getting the authors intentions. Those comments from editors above give rise to the

belief of how such knowledge of generic rhetorical moves are crucial, as it affects the constitution of the text as a whole which later influences the prospect of manuscript acceptance or rejection.

c. Linguistic features

For these results, the participants' manuscripts were investigated with respect to the most salient linguistic features that might give the biggest impact to the manuscript's organization as an academic research paper. These linguistic features include tenses and the use of personal pronouns. The differences between writing for everyday coursework and writing for publication must be clearly distinguished. There are a few rules that any writers must attend to in the latter one. With this regard, primarily before the participants' manuscripts were analyzed, an initial question was asked whether they were aware of how these two writing processes differ one to another. Three participants gave a similar response to this question.

"I think the difference is in the text structure and the vocabularies. I used to write in a more simple structure for my coursework back in my previous study because there were not many rules I have to follow. But now, when writing a research article there are some rules that should be followed." [Kris]

They find that writing for publication is way more complicated in terms of requirements, from the simple one such as adjusting to the journal's template to the hardest one which is following the standard academic written discourse. On the other hand, one participant delivered an unexpected response. According to her, there is not much difference between the two.

"I think there is no difference because these two have their own standard. I mean, coursework has its own standard set by the teacher, for example, one teacher may have some criteria for the writing task, what will be assessed, and I am as the student, do the writing by following those criteria. It is similar to writing paper for publication, there are author guidelines." [Mei]

Back to the issue of linguistic features, first, the tenses of each section of the RA were inspected. Tenses of each section are vary one to another, according to its aim. As predicted, all the manuscripts found to follow the expected rules. Introductions were presented in present tense, on the Methods and Results sections, past tense are employed, then back to the present tense on the Discussion and Conclusion sections. All four participants are aware of this convention. In case of the use of personal pronouns, it is none to be found on all of the manuscripts. They all conscious of the weight of the objectivity in academic writing.

“The basic rule of academic writing that I know is that it must avoid subjectivity, so the use of personal pronouns such as *I* and *we* is better not be used.” [Lea]

These results reveal how the students failed to meet the academic writing conventions, resulted from their lack of knowledge mostly regarding the rhetorical moves for RA's writing. The participants basically understand the main aim of academic writing which is to contribute new knowledge to the development of the academic field by presenting the research objectively, and they achieved this aim by ignoring the use of personal pronouns. Yet, return back to the overall organization and style of their manuscripts, these two concerns were not properly due to their deficiency of comprehension towards the rhetorical structures of RA.

2. The Reflected identity

Went through the participants' manuscripts and the interviews, one common pattern of identity was identified. Since all the participants are novices in the field of writing a research paper for publication, they all share the same perspective towards the dismaying process of publication. Thus, resulted in a similar academic identity. The identity identified was 'an inexperienced novice academic writer'.

As writing for publication was a new experience for them, they appeared to fail to fulfill the conventional rules of academic written discourse. Some even could not address the revision points offered by the editors and peer reviewers. Lea mentioned that she did not reply to the revision request from the editor. Even when the second email from the editor came and asked for the certainty of whether she was still interested in making the revisions and resubmit the manuscript, she was then replied with the confession of not going to resubmit her manuscript to the journal.

Most of the participants wrote and submitted the research paper into journals only to comply with the course requirements. They did not really interested in the topics and themes brought up on the course. Once the course is finished, the manuscripts will be left untouched with no further refinement. Three of the participants responded with a similar answer.

“So far only because it was the task for the course, I'm not interested in the topic” [Kris]

Nevertheless, one participant confessed that she actually loved the topic she took for her research as well as to comply with the course task. Although she was not sure of herself when composing her paper, still she was expecting that her paper would be one of those that may contribute to the topic development. When she was asked how did you view yourself when writing your RA, she answered:

“I'm interested in the issue of phonology and as far as I see, research in phonology mostly are focusing on the segmental area, that's why I'd like to explore the super segmental area.” [Mei]

Lea said that in the process of writing her manuscript, she did not really have a clear vision of how a proper academic text would be. She revealed that looking at the editor's feedback, she was then realized that her Conclusion section did not adequately link to the research aims she proposed on the Abstract and Introduction. On the other hand,

it was hard for April to reflect herself through her writing, for she did not have the proper amount of knowledge of what is academic and what is not. In the end, she failed to address the pedagogical implications of her research which were expected on the research questions. Despite all of these impediments, they still keep the hope of being a more skilled academic writer later.

“This experience of writing RA and the comments from the editor that I got have given me a little sight of how a good RA should be, and it gave me hope of being a better writer in the future.”
[April]

Conclusion

The obligation of publishing at least one research paper into a journal is now cannot be averted anymore by higher education students. As the universities are competing with each other on their publication number, it implicitly affects all the members in the academic community, and the students are no exception. The findings of this present study give a view of how the students' understanding and mastery in academic written discourse influence the success of RA's publication.

First and foremost, this study reveals the fact that the students' comprehensions of rhetorical move structures are indisputable very poor. It is the most salient case to be explored and which is, unfortunately, the main concern of the journal editors. This lack can be enhanced through learning from the existing literature, reading numerous articles to gain a better understanding of academic discourse conventions.

Through the process of composing, submitting and revising research paper, the students are moving closer towards acquiring the membership of the academic community. All the participants are aware that there is a particular competence must be possessed by in order to gain this membership. Nevertheless, the participants are all novices in academic writing in a higher education context, thus having some quandaries is

undeniable. However, the unwillingness to revise and attend to the guidance of the journal editors will not of any help in their development as academic writers. The importance of social interaction and negotiation cannot be neglected as the prerequisite for the students to be “initialized into their discourse community” (Deng, 2012, p. 318)^[16]. Hence, the assistance of the lecturers in the form of coursework of RA writing and publication such as the one which was investigated is one helpful source for the students. Furthermore, the lecturers may encourage the students to enrich their comprehension by participating in various academic activities in which writing is the main aim such as attending seminars and conferences.

Furthermore, this study limited only on the scale of four master students and majoring in English Education, thus, the results are should not be generalized into any other disciplines. For further research, the other linguistic features in a larger scope are still interesting and important to be explored.

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