

THE EFFECT OF CONTEXT IN EAP WRITING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATION IN DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

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Abstract: *In EAP (English for Academic Purposes) writing pieces such as articles, theses, and dissertations; convincing the reader to read the rest of the written material is of high importance. The literature presents several models to follow while writing abstracts. Based on this, the current study investigated the textual, organizational and rhetorical structures of the Ph.D. dissertation abstracts written in the Turkish and American contexts. The structures of abstracts were analyzed based on Hyland's (2000) model for writing abstracts. Additionally, the author presence markers and hedging devices used in the abstracts were investigated. A comparative analysis of EAP writing examples from the two contexts -Turkish and American- revealed that there exist observable differences in terms of abstract writing especially in the organizational structures and the use of hedging devices. The results of the study suggested that in both contexts there is a need to reconsider academic writing education. To be clearer writing abstracts should be handled more carefully by the professors of academic writing instruction.*

Keywords: EAP; Organization of Abstracts; Move Structure; Author Presence; Voice; Hedging.

1. Introduction

In ESP (English for Specific Purposes), the genre-based writing instruction still needs to be developed says Cheng (2006). The field of EAP writing also suffers from the same problem (Swales & Luebs, 2002 as cited in Cheng 2006). Similarly in Turkey which is an EFL context the graduate students at the department of English language teaching are often directed to complete an academic writing course before they start their academic writing journey. Considering this, it is clear that EAP writing is a global issue to be investigated in detail.

Research studies include three main stages; planning, researching and documenting. The planning and researching phases require a good deal of field knowledge, and organization skills. However, at the final stage researchers, like marketing specialists, they try to sell their work while they are documenting their studies. These promotion efforts are most visible in the abstract section of a study. Abstracts serve the function to introduce a research study to potential readers and aim to attract them to read the rest of the text. The readers find the abstract immediately after the title, they develop an idea about the rest of the text, and decide whether to read or skip the rest of the study (Hyland, 2000). Therefore, the

structural organization of abstracts needs careful planning. It is safe to claim that the research article abstracts have an easier job compared to the Ph.D. dissertations' when the high number of pages considered. The Ph.D. dissertation abstracts are expected to convince the readers to read hundreds of pages while the number is quite small in a research article. The difference between research article abstracts and Ph.D. dissertation abstracts is not limited to the number of pages that they introduce, there are some other structural differences such as using more transitions, evidentials and hedges (El-Dakhs, 2018) as well. Therefore, investigating the Ph.D. dissertation abstracts in detail can shed light on their structural properties.

Researchers in this field have been mainly interested in analyzing the introduction sections of theses and research articles (e.g. Küçükoğlu, 2016, Ozturk, 2014). However, being one of the most important sections in a study, abstract sections remained somehow ignored. A few attempts to analyze other sections of articles r theses also exist. Tseng (2018) analyzed the theoretical framework sections of 20 research articles. In another study Cotos, Huffman and Link (2017) developed a model for the analysis of methods sections of research articles. It is quite surprising that the number of studies investigating the textual and rhetorical organization of abstracts is very limited (e.g. Samraj, 2005; dos Santos, 1996). When the Ph.D. dissertation abstracts are considered the situation is even worse since the body of literature does not contain any studies suggesting how they are written. Therefore, this paper explores the textual, organizational and rhetorical structures of the Ph.D. dissertation abstracts in the field of language teaching written in both Turkish and American contexts.

2. Models of Abstract Writing

There are several models to investigate the textual organization of abstracts (Weissberg & Buker 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Santos, 1996; Hyland, 2000). According to Weissberg and Buker (1990) a good abstract needs to include five moves which are *Background*, *Purpose*, *Method*, *Results*, and *Conclusion*. In their model, the first move *-Background-* is considered optional. Bhatia (1993) offered a model with four moves for abstract writing. The four moves were namely; *Introducing Purpose*, *Describing Methodology*, *Summarizing Results*, and *Presenting Conclusions*. Later on, dos Santos (1996) developed a model with five moves and sub-moves for the first, second, and fifth moves (Table 1). Thus, it provides a more in-depth analysis of the abstracts. Similarly, Hyland (2000) proposed a five-move pattern, which consisted of *Introduction*, *Purpose*, *Method*, *Product*, and *Conclusion* moves. A closer look at these different perspectives for the analysis of the move structure of the abstracts reveals that there exist many points in common with slight differences. For instance, each of the aforementioned models included an introduction to the subject while their focal point slightly differed. The only exception for this is Bhatia (1993) whose four-move model includes an introduction of purpose rather than background for the study. Similarly, the conclusion section is common in all of the models except for dos Santos's (1996) model who named the last move as the discussion of results rather than conclusion but a closer look at the sub-moves reveals that this move includes conclusion and recommendations which are stated in other models, as well.

Table 1. A proposed pattern for research article abstracts. (dos Santos, 1996).

The five moves	
Move 1	Situating the research Submove 1A – Stating the current knowledge and/or Submove 1B – Citing previous research and/or Submove 1C – Extended previous research and/or Submove 2 – Stating a problem
Move 2	Presenting the research Submove 1A – Indicating main features and/or Submove 1B – Indicating main purpose and/or Submove 2 – Hypothesis raising
Move 3	Describing the methodology
Move 4	Summarizing the results
Move 5	Discussing the research Submove 1 – Drawing conclusions Submove 2 – Giving recommendations

3. Related Studies

The field of EAP provides studies with different sets of corpora for the analysis of abstracts. For instance, researchers studied to determine the quality of the abstracts in research articles. While there can be found several studies focusing on the evaluation of abstracts in different disciplines such as applied linguistics and educational technology (e.g. Pho, 2008), clinical psychology, educational psychology, health psychology, and legal and criminological psychology (e.g. Hartley & Benjamin, 1998), and conservation biology and wildlife behavior (e.g. Samraj, 2005); there are other studies investigating the research article abstracts within one discipline such as applied linguistics (e.g. Tseng, 2011), medicine (e.g. Salager-Meyer, 1990; 1992), protozoology (e.g. Cross & Oppenheim, 2006). This pattern of investigating the structure of abstracts within one discipline was adopted in the present study, as well. Some other researchers compared the abstracts of the papers written in two different languages; for example, English and Spanish, (e.g. Martin, 2003), English and French (e.g. van Bonn & Swales, 2007), English and Chinese (e.g. Hu & Cao, 2011). Rather than comparing different languages, this study adopted comparing two different contexts (Turkish Context vs. American Context) within one language (English). This way the abstract writing patterns in the two contexts can be clearly outlined.

A structural analysis of abstracts provides a good deal of information but not sufficient on its own terms. For a comprehensive understanding of abstract writing, the different dimensions of analysis should be included as well. When the literature is reviewed there are many studies investigating different aspects of abstract writing. For instance, Hyland and Tse (2005) investigated the use of evaluative 'that' in 465 abstracts. Salager-Meyer (1992), on the other hand, studied abstracts in terms of the 'verb tense' and 'modality usage'.

There are several studies investigating the authors' *voice* in academic publications (Cadman, 1997; Hyland, 2002; Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001). Of these studies, Hyland (2002) analyzed voice in 64 undergraduate theses in Hong Kong. He found out in his study that the representation of author in the texts was quite low. He makes a claim at the end of his study that the native contexts encourage

the conscious employment of author presence markers while in other cultures the authors still have hesitations. This claim needed to be confirmed with further studies in order for a secure understanding of the issue. To investigate this issue the present paper analyzed the author presence markers comparatively in two different contexts one of these two contexts is American context, which is one of the Anglo-American contexts as named in Hyland's study, while the other is Turkish context, which is an L2 culture. From this point of view, the present study aims to clarify the difference between the two contexts, if there exist any, in terms of using author presence markers.

Ivanič and Camps (2001) investigated the papers of six Mexican graduate students in the UK. The researchers directed the students to write essays, and then they interviewed with the students. They analyzed the papers of students. Three positioning types were determined: *ideational positioning*, *interpersonal positioning*, and *textual positioning*. The voice uses of authors containing an idea were referred as ideational positioning. On the other hand, the interpersonal positioning referred the type of voice use that the authors aimed to communicate with their readers about their 'sense of authority and certainty', or 'their relationships with readers' (p. 21). Finally, the third type of positioning referred the authors' positioning 'themselves in relation to the mode of communication' (p. 28).

Research Questions

- 1- What is the move structure of the Ph.D. dissertation abstracts?
 - a. What is the frequency of moves based on Hyland's Model (2000) in Ph.D. dissertations' abstracts in both Turkish and American contexts?
 - b. Does the move structure of the Ph.D. dissertation abstracts comply with Hyland's Model (2000)?
 - c. Is there any correspondence between the dissertation abstracts written in Turkey and in the USA regarding their move structure?
- 2- What is the frequency of hedging devices in both contexts?
 - a. Is there a correspondence between the Ph.D. theses in written in Turkey and in the USA in terms of the structure of the hedging devices?
- 3- What is the frequency of author presence markers?
 - a. Is there a correspondence between the Ph.D. theses in written in Turkey and in the USA in terms of the structure of the author presence markers?
- 4- What is the frequency of the hedging devices and author presence markers in each move?

4. Methodology

Abstract section is common to all Ph.D. dissertations and they are considered to have a great impact on readers. The readers judge the texts by their abstracts first. As mentioned previously abstracts welcome the readers first and try to convince readers to read the rest of the text. Therefore, they need to be based on a structure.

This study was designed using qualitative method which is based mainly inferring the move structures of the abstracts as well as figuring out the frequencies of the hedges and author presence markers. The abstracts are the very first section of a

scientific study. Especially in long texts such as Ph.D. abstracts' duty are more challenging. The readers expect to obtain a comprehensive picture of the study which should be written in a way to attract the reader to read the rest of the text, as well. For this reason, the author of the present study decided to investigate the abstracts.

The corpus of this study was compiled to include 20 Ph.D. dissertations 10 of which were written in Turkey and the rest 10 of the dissertations were written in the American context. In order to enhance the reliability of the study, firm criteria for corpus formation were established and strictly followed. First, the dissertations are expected to be written in the field of ELT and to be practice oriented. To characterize their fields in Turkey only the works of ELT department members were considered. Similarly, in the USA the dissertations written in the Applied Linguistics departments were taken into consideration. Two diverse contexts were chosen for the analysis. The main motive behind this was to find out the effect of the context on the Ph.D. dissertations abstracts. Secondly, dissertations were investigated carefully based on their practical orientations and their methodologies. The works using similar methodology were considered as having a high level of uniformity in terms of language structures and preferences compared to dissertations adopting different methodologies. Therefore after an analysis of the research designs, experimental theses were decided to be used in this study. Finally, the dissertations were chosen among the ones written in the last ten years. In the Turkish context, the corpus of the study covered all of the dissertations written in the selected period.

This study adopted a top-down approach to the analysis of the data. In this approach first the 'discourse units' were determined and then the analysis is conducted accordingly (Biber, Connor & Upton, 2007). Sentences are decided as a unit of analysis for the move structure analysis of the abstracts. The abstracts of Ph.D. dissertations were copied to an MS Word Document for a comfortable analysis. The data were analyzed through careful scanning by the researcher. Hyland's (2000) model was adopted as the tool for analysis (Table 2). A color code was used to identify the types of moves in the abstracts. (Figure 1).

Table 2. Hyland's Model for abstract writing (Hyland, 2000).

Move	Explanation
Introduction	Establishes context of the paper and motivates the research or discussion.
Purpose	Indicates purpose, thesis or hypothesis, outlines the intention behind the paper.
Method	Provides information on design, procedures, assumptions, approach, data, etc.
Product	States main findings or results, the argument, or what was accomplished
Conclusion	Interprets or extends results beyond scope of the paper, draws inferences, points to applications or wider implications.

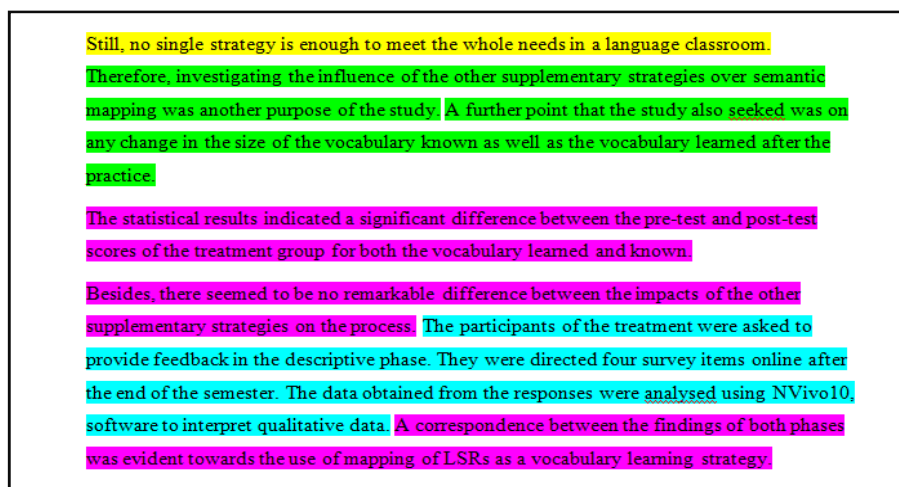


Figure 1. A screenshot from the structural analysis

Additionally, a word by word analysis procedure was applied to determine the hedges as well as the author presence markers. The researcher read the whole text and determined the hedging devices as well as the author presence markers. As the third step, the frequency of hedging devices and author presence markers in each move was determined. The researcher trained a second rater who is specialized in the field of second language writing. The data were analyzed by both of the raters. The results compared after the analysis, the findings of the analyses were compared. The results were revealed that the in the corpus composed of the Turkish dissertations four dissertations were revealed full agreement, while the remaining six dissertations revealed differences. On the other hand, the American corpus revealed six full agreement compared to four disagreement. These differences were discussed and a full agreement was reached between the raters as in the process followed by Martinez (2005) and Taş (2008).

5. Findings & Discussion

5.1. Moves

The dissertations were analyzed to determine their move structures. To give an answer to the first research question, the results of these analyses were presented in the following tables (Table 3, 4). These analysis revealed interesting results in terms of the similarities and differences of dissertation abstracts' structuring in both contexts. The move structures in the dissertations written in the Turkish and American contexts have two common points; first, they all include 2,3,4 move sequence. These three moves are as mentioned above *Purpose, Method, and Product* moves. Secondly, except for D3 all of the dissertations followed the order of the moves as 2,3,4. It is obvious from these finding that these three moves were considered by the researchers as the basic and essential structure of an abstract in both contexts.

In the corpus of 10 dissertations written in the Turkish context, six of them were

structured to include only 2,3,4 move structure. Except for the *Dissertation 9*, the remaining three dissertations followed an irregular structure of moves which included repetition of moves and going back and forth among moves. Interestingly, among these four dissertations which were the only ones to include the first move (*Introduction*). It was only D9 which positioned Move 1 at the beginning while the three remaining dissertations (D2, D3, D10) turned back to introduction after providing the purpose, and even sometimes the method of their studies.

Similarly, the second important point in the corpus of Turkish context is that neither of the abstracts included the final move which is the *Conclusion*. Clearly, the researchers in Turkey did not consider drawing inferences and implications on their results as important. However, since all of these dissertations were selected among the practice-oriented studies providing implications and practical clues are of high importance. This can be considered as a problem for the potential readers who may not find the dissertations appealing especially when they cannot figure out the practical implications of these studies.

It is worth mentioning that in three of the dissertations written in Turkey (D4, D5, D6) abstracts were concluded with a sentence which announced that the results were discussed according to the literature and suggestions were made (See *Excerpts 1, and 2*); however, the results or suggestions were not mentioned. Therefore these were considered as a '*redundant move*'. They did not fall into the definitions of any of the moves. Another interesting point is that all three of these sentences used almost exactly the same words. To be more specific two of the dissertations (D5 and D6) were written using exactly the same words while in D4 the only difference was the word "study" which was preferred instead of the expression "research" used in the two dissertations.

Excerpt,

1.

Findings of the study were discussed in the light of the relevant literature and some suggestions for further studies were made. (D4)

2.

Findings of the research were discussed in the light of the relevant literature and some suggestions were made. (D5, D6)

Table 3. The structure and frequency of move types in Turkish Ph.D. dissertations

Thesis	Move Structure	Number of Moves
D1	2,3,4	3
D2	2,1, 2,3,4	5
D3	2,3,1,2,4,3,4	7
D4	2,3,4	3
D5	2,3,4	3
D6	2,3,4	3
D7	2,3,4	3
D8	2,3,4	3
D9	1,2,3,4	4
D10	2,3,1,2,3,4	6

The structural organization of dissertations in the USA corpus yielded quite different results compared to the dissertations in the Turkish corpus. To start with, no repetitions were observed in the organization of these dissertations' abstracts (Table 4). In other words, in these dissertations, the writers did not go back and forth between the moves. Secondly, they all followed the sequence except for the *D14*, and *D16*. The *D14* turned to an irregular structure by providing the introduction at the end of the study. Another point is that all of the dissertations except for *D12*, *D17*, and *D19* included the introduction part. This can be argued that the authors were aware of the importance of providing background information and preparing the reader for the study. Similarly, half of these included the 5th move (conclusion) which is again an important feature to wrap up the study by providing implications and further interpretations. These two features as mentioned in the above paragraph are problematic in the Turkish corpus.

Table 4. The structure and frequency of move types in Ph.D. dissertations written in the USA

Thesis	Move Structure	Number of Moves
D11	1,2,3,4,5	5
D12	2,3,4	3
D13	1,2,3,4,5	5
D14	2,3,4,1	5
D15	1,2,3,4	4
D16	1,2,3,4,5	7
D17	2,3,4	3
D18	1,2,3,4,5	5
D19	2,3,4	3
D20	1,2,3,4,5	5

5.2. Author Presence Markers

Author voice is not observed in the investigated dissertations' abstracts except for one instance in the corpus of Turkish dissertations (*Excerpt 4*) and two occurrences in the American dissertations (*Excerpt 4*). It can be understood that the researchers refrained from putting themselves on the forefront in their writings. Most of the time they incorporated passive voice or other subjects such as "*The study revealed that...*" instead of directly referring to themselves. In *Excerpt 3*, the author used *we* instead of *I* which can be considered as a way of indirect inclusion as well.

Excerpts;

3.

Although the two L2 groups were significantly less accurate than native English speakers in processing subject extraction from nonfinite clauses, we can still say that the subject-object asymmetry in wh-extractions in nonfinite clauses is a characteristic of both native and nonnative sentence processing. (D10)

4.

The semantic map that is proposed contains three dimensions, which I refer to as Grammatical Number, Referentiality, and Discourse Mode. Each of these

dimensions contains a number of further semantic values or pragmatic functions – which I will label “attributes” – that are implicated in English article choice. (D20)

Based on the findings regarding author voice it is quite difficult to create a picture of the current situation in the Ph.D. dissertation abstracts either in the Turkish or in the American context. The reasons for this may be related to the interdisciplinary differences in academic writing. Different academic disciplines or communities have different structural and rhetorical approaches in writing. Another possible reason for this can be considered as the number of abstracts investigated may have an influence on this finding. A larger corpus may provide a better view of the issue.

5.3. Hedging

The overall instances of hedges were very small in number. The authors did not incorporate hedging devices very much while reporting their studies. It can be argued that the reason behind this small number may be connected to the absence of the 5th move (Conclusion). The authors did not provide any comment, interpretation, implication or recommendation in their abstracts because of the absence of the Conclusion move, therefore it is quite understandable that they did not incorporate hedging devices.

Only three of the abstracts in the Turkish corpus incorporated hedging devices. Of these instances, one occurrence was observed in the first move (*Excerpt 6*). The authors incorporated hedging to state an idea that still requires further studies and does not have a consensus upon. In another instance interestingly hedging was utilized in the second move while talking about the purpose of the study. In fact, such use of hedging is quite uncommon, the authors are expected to be precise while talking about the purpose of their studies. Finally, two instances of hedging were incorporated in the abstracts while talking about the product of the study. It is acceptable and most of the time advisable that in the discussion of the findings hedging can be utilized.

Excerpts;

6.

*Therefore, it is believed that assessments **should** reveal the underlying causes of learners’ poor performances and actions **should** be taken to remediate these underlying problems to foster development. (D2)*

7.

*The learning **can** be monitored if the learners have internalized the knowledge through mediation, and **can** use this knowledge in other assessment contexts without mediation. (D2)*

8.

*The analysis of the mean scores of the two incidental teaching groups demonstrated that both incidental learning conditions in the study **can** lead to some learning gains. (D7)*

9.

*Although the two L2 groups were significantly less accurate than native English speakers in processing subject extraction from nonfinite clauses, we **can** still say that the subject-object asymmetry in wh-extractions in nonfinite clauses is a characteristic of both native and nonnative sentence processing. (D10)*

When the hedging uses in the American context dissertations considered it can be observed that there is not a cumulative pattern based on a specific move such as

conclusion. The instances were observed as two occurrences in the introduction (*Excerpts 10, and 11*) in which the author tried to focus on the significance of EAP classroom instruction. However, from the tone of the writer, it is obvious that s/he does not want to undertake too much responsibility. Another instance was found in the product move (*Excerpt 9*) where the author is discussing his/her findings. In her discussion, she used hedging on a point which is still under dispute in the literature. It can clearly be understood that the author does not have enough evidence to provide a strong claim at this point. Finally, two occurrences of hedging were observed in the conclusion move (*Excerpts 12, and 13*). In these two occurrences, the authors seem to be providing implications for practice. It is quite understandable and widespread that hedging is used in the implications stage of academic works.

Excerpts;

10.

*It is argued that these errors **can** largely be attributed to L1 transfer, since Arabic is significantly different from English in terms of how to encode the causative-inchoative alternation. (D14)*

11.

*However, no study to date has examined the **possible** effect of classroom instruction on ESL students' ability to write discourse synthesis essays. (D15)*

12.

*It is thus important to know if academic preparation programs such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs **can** successfully teach discourse synthesis writing to the ESL students to assist them in their academic preparation. (D15)*

13.

*Results of this study strongly suggested that metacognitive reading strategy instruction (MRSI) **should** be integrated into regular EFL reading classes. (D16)*

14.

*In addition, it is suggested that the methodological paradigm used to test the semantic map model **may** be useful as an experimental paradigm for testing semantic maps of other constructions and languages. (D20)*

6. Conclusion

This study was conducted to determine the effect of context in EAP writing. A comparative analysis of the Ph.D. dissertation abstracts written in two different contexts namely Turkish and American was administered under the scope of this study. This study was designed as threefold; first, the organizational structure of abstracts was analyzed; secondly; the author voice was investigated in the abstracts; and finally, the hedging devices incorporated by the researchers were investigated.

A comprehensive analysis revealed that the effect of context was visible in certain aspects of the Ph.D. dissertation abstracts. In other words, the abstracts written in Turkey and in the USA had more differences than similarities. The organizational structures of abstracts are quite different in both contexts. Another important point is that the interrater-agreement was higher in the American corpora compared to the Turkish corpora. In the English language, which is considered among the western languages stated by Hinds (1987) as writer-responsible language, the meaning is clarified by the writer with a narrow place for reader interpretation,

while in Turkish which may be considered as a reader-responsible, the meaning is left to the interpretation of the reader. The difference between the raters in the two corpora can be explained with this perception of the rhetorical preference of authors. The “redundant move” is also an interesting finding of this study which deserves further investigation with a larger corpus. There is still too much to do in both contexts to obtain a smooth organization in the abstracts. In future studies, the organizational structure may be studied in other western and eastern contexts to reveal the reader-responsibility and writer-responsibility between the languages. The author voice is not observable in both corpora which can be considered as the general tendency of academics. Finally, the frequency and style of hedging devices also constitute a difference in both contexts. This is linked to the move structure as mentioned previously. The absence of the fifth move has an impact on the less use of hedges in the Turkish corpus. This study is limited to its corpus. Due to the small number of dissertations in the corpus, the results of this study cannot be generalized. However, the findings revealed at the end of the study provided useful information in terms of future research and practice of academic writing.

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