Poster Presentation

Abstract Writing Instruction to Hetero-Homogenous Learner Groups in Science and Engineering

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Teaching abstract writing to a heterogeneous class of English as a foreign language (EFL) science and engineering students can pose challenges for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) practitioners. This short paper discusses a genre analysis approach to abstract writing instruction to the aforementioned learner group. Implementing a genre analysis model, attention will focus on easily observable language moves of research article abstracts. This focus can help students learn and understand on a fundamental level, the rhetorical function(s) of each move, and textual features often used to realize those functions. The paper encourages rhetorical consciousness-raising and reflection, and promotes assisting EFL students to become better writers as well as improving their academic texts.

Introduction

One important area of ESP instruction is teaching abstract writing to EFL science and engineering university students in Japan. This instruction is important because if these students intend to earn a degree from graduate school, they must write the abstract of their graduate thesis in English. However, teaching abstract writing can pose a variety of challenges to ESP practitioners working in this ESP context. One challenge may be a case where the learner group is heterogeneous. Although homogenous in the sense of being students of science and engineering, a technical writing class may contain students from different departments such as architecture and computer science.

Despite the challenges to teaching a heterogeneous group, there are advantages to having a multidisciplinary class. One advantage is that attention

can be switched from the correctness of the language to the rhetorical features of language in a text (Swales & Feak, 2004). Swales and Feak (2004) also argue that this switch encourages rhetorical consciousness-raising and can lead to a variety of rich group discussions. They argue that this type of multidisciplinary class can create a learning atmosphere and a community among its members that is more tolerant and less competitive.

The Model and Method

With the foregoing in mind, this short paper introduces a genre analysis approach to teaching abstract writing on an introductory level to the aforementioned learner group in the third and fourth year of university. In my experience working in this type of context, I find it more effective to teach more general and easily observable genre features (Suzuki, 2012). The five-move model I use (Table 1) is proposed by Swales and Feak (2009). Having students focus on these moves in abstracts is designed to help them learn and understand on a fundamental level the rhetorical function(s) of each move and to recognize the textual features that are often implemented to realize those functions.

In class, the students first learn these abstract moves. Then, we look at a number of abstracts from various disciplines and analyze them using the Swales

Table 1
*Five Typical Moves of the Research Article Abstract**

Move #	Typical Labels	Implied Questions
Move 1	Background/Introduction/Situation	What do we know about the topic? Why is the topic important?
Move 2	Present Research/Purpose	What is this study about?
Move 3	Methods/Materials/Subjects/ Procedures	How was it done?
Move 4	Results/Findings	What was discovered?
Move 5	Discussion/Conclusions/ Implications/Recommendations	What do the findings mean?

*Taken from Swales & Feak, 2009, p. 5

and Feak (2009) model. Through their analyses, they discover that in some cases all five moves are realized. In other cases, one or more moves are missing. Sometimes, they will observe that two moves will occur in one sentence, or that it takes two or more sentences to accomplish a move.

Results and Discussion

As a result of the above activities, the students become more rhetorically conscious. Through their discoveries, they learn that the model is a guide rather than a rule. As Anthony (2000) argues, they avoid the danger of overgeneralization by forming their own generalizations through their analyses of authentic materials from a variety of disciplines. Finally, it is important to note that this genre analysis approach and model are designed to work for both heterogeneous and homogenous learner groups.

Acknowledgments

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Author's bio

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