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“Academic Discourse through the Lens of Genre Analysis: Disciplinary Variation”

Given the necessity for rapid dissemination of scientific knowledge, scientific research articles have become one of the common means of communication among scientists around the world. In addition, English has been promoted to be an international language both in professional and academic settings. As a result, possessing knowledge of how scientific research articles in English are constructed becomes essential in scientific academia. To be successful in publishing research work, scientists, like scholars of other disciplines, need to be able to express their findings and contributions in English. Moreover, they need to present the findings and contributions in a manner that is acceptable and conforming to the requirements of the target journal.

This presentation introduces a discourse analysis approach, known as genre analysis, as an effective tool to provide insights into how texts are constructed. According to Swales (1990, 2004), the creator of this approach, a genre is a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purposes which are identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic discourse community in which it regularly occurs. Usually, a genre is highly structured and conventionalized. The goal of genre analysis is to identify the rhetorical organization of texts belonging to a given genre. Based on this notion, the terms ‘move’ and ‘step’ are invented to refer to textual units of analysis. That is, a ‘move’ refers to a text segment that performs a communicative function, and a ‘step’ is a subunit of a move that, in turn, contributes to the move’s communicative function.

This talk focuses on the application of genre analysis in analyzing specifically academic discourse. Given the pivotal role of research articles as a means to exchange and disseminate research findings and innovations, the research article genre is chosen to be the focus of this presentation. Three separate corpora representing the three diverse academic disciplines were compiled, namely, biochemistry, microbiology, and civil engineering. Based on the impact factors, the

top five journals representing the most prestigious journals in each discipline were determined. Subsequently, twelve experimental research articles from each chosen journal were randomly selected. In short, each corpus representing each academic discipline consists of a total of 60 research articles. All of the articles in each of the three corpora follow the nomenclature of IMRD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion).

The genre analysis applied to research articles of each academic discipline elucidates the textual structural patterns conventionally followed by scientists in their respective disciplines. The findings reveal that even though the articles from the three scientific disciplines, in general, share some common features of rhetorical organizations, they display certain discernible disciplinary variations. This body of knowledge allows particularly novice scientists or scholars to better understand how scientific texts are constructed. The study also sheds light onto the significance of the awareness of conventional patterns of organization preferred in their respective disciplines. Keeping this in mind, these novice article writers will be able to successfully and internationally disseminate and exchange their research work.