IN THE NAME OF GOD

Faculty of Human Sciences
Department of English language and literature

M.A.Thesis

Response Articles: Micro and Macro Analysis

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June 2010

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Evaluated and approved by thesis committee:as…Excellent……

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I should, hereby, assume the responsibility for any possible flaws in this research study.

To

My parents,

My husband, and

The reason of my life, my son, AmirAli.

Abstract

The present study reports an analysis of response articles in four different disciplines in the social sciences, i.e., Linguistics, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Accounting, and Psychology. The study has three phases: micro analysis, macro analysis, and e-mail interview. The results of the micro analysis indicate that a three-level linguistic pattern is used by the writers in order to criticize others' ideas. These levels are: the *morphological*, the *syntactic*, and the *discoursal* level. Each level includes some sublevels: the Morphological level: words, phrases, and metaphors, the Syntactic level: Questions, Conditional Clauses, and Connectors, the Discoursal level: Audience Recruit and Discourse Community Recruit. Each of these sublevels also has its own subcategories. The macro analysis of the texts, using Swales' [Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis. English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], indicates that nine moves can be realized in the response articles. Six moves are common to all of the articles in the corpus, and, thus, are called obligatory: 'Referring to the writer and her/his article', 'Expressing disagreement or criticism', 'Stating reasons for disagreement', 'Supporting disagreement and criticism', 'Making conclusion' and 'Proposing a theory, claim, etc.'. The other three moves are optional; they are not seen in all response articles. These moves are: 'Acknowledgement', 'Determining the domain and subject', and 'Expressing admiration, approval or agreement'. Two of the moves are accomplished by more than one strategy: the move 'Expressing disagreement or criticism': 'Asking questions', 'Using conditional clauses', and 'Direct disagreement', and the move 'Supporting disagreement and criticism': 'Referring to or quoting from other writers and researchers', 'Giving some examples related to the subject', and 'Referring to one's own findings'. The analysis of the e-mail interviews with two of the writers of the articles in the corpus supports the results of the text analysis stage.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1.   Introduction

This Chapter presents a general introduction to the research. The subject and the purposes of the study are introduced in the 'statement of the problem and purpose of the study'. The probable contribution of the study in the realm of linguistics is explained in the 'significance of the study'. The research questions are, then, stated in the next section. The Contents of Chapters Four, Five, and Six will be based on these questions. The next section is allotted to the 'design of the study' which deals with an overall view of the Chapters of the research. The fundamental concepts of the study are described in the 'definition of important terms'. The last section of the present Chapter will be the 'delimitation' in which the restrictions of the study are explained.

1.2.   Statement of the problem and purpose of the study

The role of language in different communities is so significant that no one can deny it. This role gets more importance when it comes to discourse communities, and especially academic communities. Language as one of the most important possessions of human beings can act as a strong device to exert a great influence on others. This useful device plays different roles in different situations. In a discourse community it can have a considerable influence on the members since communication is a vital characteristic of such communities, and it is achieved through language, whether spoken or written.

Discourse communities and the use of language in them, have been the subject of many studies from different points of view in recent years. Herzberg (1986, p. 1) [cited in Swales (1990)] believes that the expression 'discourse community' testifies to the increasingly common assumption that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups. She also states that the pedagogies associated with writing across the curriculum and academic English use the notion of 'discourse communities' to signify a cluster of ideas: that language use in a group

is a form of social behavior, that discourse is a means of maintaining and extending the group's knowledge and of initiating new members into the group, and that discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group's knowledge.

Swales (1990) believes that 'discourse community' is an expression which refers to a group of individuals who possess six characteristics:

1. A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals.

2. A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members.

3. A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.

4. A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.

5. In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis.

6. A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise (pp. 24-27).

Since every community has its own genres, members of a discourse community should be familiar with the conventions of the community. Swales believes that the discoursal expectations are created by the genres that articulate the operations of the discourse community. Being familiar with these genres, members of a discourse community try to improve the knowledge of the community by sharing their experiences and findings of their researches, with other members of their community. The common way to accomplish such a goal, especially in academic communities, is to write different articles in which some new findings, claims, or theories are presented. When a new claim or theory is presented by a member of a discourse community, as a researcher, it is natural that it causes different reactions of other members. Some members would agree with these new ideas and appreciate them, while others may disagree with them or even criticize what the writer has argued. Among the members who do not agree with new presented ideas,

there are some who write articles in response of the work of mentioned writers. These articles are called 'response articles'.

In such articles writers try to criticize the new claims and defend themselves in a logical way. They use a specific method to achieve their goal in a response article, i.e., to discredit others' claims and at the same time to support their own claims.

Response articles are considered as specific genre in discourse communities, as far as we know for the first time, in the present study. In fact they are a way of communicating others in the discourse community, have their own rules, conventions, and style, are common in most, if not all, of the discourse communities, have specific purposes, and are known by members of discourse communities. Therefore a response article can be called a genre in discourse communities. Definition of a genre which was the source of this idea that response articles can be called a genre, is given by Swales (1990, p. 58). The definition is quoted here in full:

> A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, examples of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community. The genre names inherited and produced by discourse communities and imported by others constitute valuable ethnographic communication, but typically need further validation.

As a matter of fact writers use different strategies in order to criticize other writers. The focus of the present study is these strategies. It seems that the best way to study them is to consider response articles as specific genre and do a genre analysis. Swales (1990) believes that genres vary along several parameters such as complexity of rhetorical purpose, degree to which exemplars of the genre are prepared or constructed in advance of

their communicative instantiation (Nystrand, 1986), in terms of the mode or medium through which they are expressed, the extent to which their producers are conventionally expected to consider their anticipated audiences and readerships. Therefore at the beginning of the study, I intended to specify the features of response articles, and to know whether there are any specific linguistic patterns which are used by the writers in response articles, intentionally or unintentionally.

I thought that there must be a kind of linguistic pattern by use of which a writer's goal is achieved. In order to test this hypothesis I started by studying three response articles in linguistics, which is one of the social sciences. A kind of linguistic pattern was found by preliminary study. It was needed to test the pattern by studying some other articles in the social sciences. If the result of studying some other articles was the same as the results of studying the first articles, one could conclude that this linguistic pattern was the common linguistic pattern in response articles in the some social sciences, and it could be claimed that the writers use a pattern like this, in order to reject a claim or to criticize an idea in a response article. Then all of the articles in the corpus should be analyzed according to this pattern to determine what the references and functions of each linguistic level of the pattern are, and how they help a writer to achieve her/his goal.

The next purpose of the study is to specify different moves of a response article as a specific genre. Since every genre has its own moves which are usually known by the members of a discourse community, consciously or unconsciously, a response article, as a genre, must have its own moves. Finding these moves needs a detailed study of the response articles in the corpus. It is expected, that a pattern of similar moves with the same functions appears in the articles. These moves, then, have to be studied to see how they are accomplished by specific linguistic features, i.e., strategies. The next purpose of the study, therefore, is to specify the strategies used in different moves.

The last purpose of the study is to compare the ideas of writers of response articles in the corpus with the results of the text analysis, to have triangulation in the study. To do this comparison, collecting e-mail data from some writers of response articles in the corpus seems necessary.

Therefore the purpose of the present study is to specify the linguistic pattern of response articles, their references and discourse functions, their moves and strategies, and the extent to which the results of text analysis and the ideas of the writers themselves approve of each other.

1.3.   Significance of the study

Many researches have been conducted on academic writing. These researches often have concentrated on what strategies one should use, what issues one should avoid, and what cases one should bear in mind in order to write an academic text, an article, a thesis or a research paper, to receive acceptance and appreciation from others, especially members of the same discourse community. These articles have been written to be used as guides by university students, teachers of academic writing, other researchers and writers. So they can be useful in both learning and teaching English.

Studying in this area sometimes is driven to subcategories such as research proposals, scientific articles in different disciplines, different parts of thesis, etc. These researches are usually accomplished through text analysis, and their findings are based on the common features of different academic texts.

The differences between the present study and other similar studies in the area are: first, response articles have not been viewed as specific genre up to now, and thus the general studies on academic writing cover this genre only in a general and overall way. In this study response articles are specifically considered as separate genre and will be analyzed in detail. Second, these studies are often conducted according to just text analysis and the ideas of individuals involving them, i.e., the writers of the texts, are not usually asked by interviews in order to compare them with the results of text analysis to see to what extent they approve of each other. In the present study I tried to consider triangulation; so some questions will be asked from the writers of response articles by e-mail (since there is no direct access to them). The results of analyzing the e-mail data and the text analysis will be compared too. So, this study hopes to fill those gaps by considering response articles as genres, and trying to have triangulation in the study.

Therefore this study would have theoretical value in the domain of the knowledge of academic writing in the social sciences, and would present a deeper understanding of this kind of writing, its reasons and motivations, and also its methods and strategies.

The results of the present study can be useful for university students, university instructors, teachers of academic writing, and researchers in the social sciences, especially those who value writing research papers and studies so much. These individuals can make use of different methods and strategies to criticize the ideas of other members of the discourse community, with a more complete knowledge. In addition to that, findings of this

study can reduce probable unintentional outcomes which some writers cause by using some strategies unconsciously, and cause the writers approach their goals in writing a response article. Therefore, it can help the writers approach their goals in writing a response article.

1.4.   Research questions

The research questions of the present study are:

1. Can any specific linguistic pattern with different levels be found in response articles?

2. How do the writers of response articles use such pattern in writing a response article? (What are the references and discourse functions of this pattern?)

3. Are there any specific moves and strategies in response articles?

4. Do the writers' comments on the patterns approve the results of text analysis?

1.5.   Design of the study

The content of the present study is based on the research questions. It is composed of seven Chapters which will be explained briefly below.

Normally, the first Chapter i.e., 'Introduction' deals with a general introduction of the research. 'statement of the problem and purpose of the study' is the first section in this Chapter; then, 'significance of the study' is given. 'Research questions and hypotheses are stated, and 'design of the study' is given. 'Definition of important terms' is the next part of the Chapter, and 'delimitation' is the last part of Chapter One.

Chapter Two is called 'review of the related literature'. This Chapter includes two levels. In the first level of this Chapter 'definition of the main concepts' is given first. Then, 'theoretical framework of the study' is explained thoroughly. In the second level of the Chapter 'explanation of some works, done regarding the theoretical framework' are presented. In this part thirty articles written on academic writing and genre analysis are introduced briefly with their findings.

'Method' is the title of Chapter Three. As it is clear from the name, the methodology of this research is presented in detail. An introduction of purpose of the study is given first, and then, an explanation about the reasons of choosing the subject of the study and the

theoretical framework is given. Then a short description of the first theoretical framework, which was changed after some time, together with a brief presentation of its findings is given. The next part is explanation about data collecting, i.e., the articles and e-mail data, which are the corpus of the study, and how they have been analyzed.

The first three Chapters are common to all of the theses. The main part of the thesis begins with Chapter Four: 'Three levels of criticism'. This Chapter, as it was mentioned above, is based on the research questions. The first question deals with probable linguistic pattern with different levels in response articles; so, this Chapter shows the text analysis of response articles and its findings regarding this question. A linguistic pattern with three levels is introduced, and some examples from the corpus are given for clarification. The second question deals with how the writers of response articles use such pattern in writing a response article: (What are the references and discourse functions of this pattern?). Therefore, the next part of the Chapter tries to answer this question. The texts are analyzed according to the pattern and the findings are presented. The point is that one of the levels of the linguistic pattern devotes a separate Chapter to itself, regarding this question, because of its importance. It will be discussed below.

'The role of discoursal strategies' is Chapter Five of the thesis. In this Chapter the readers can find an introduction of the importance of the discoursal level in writing response articles, an analysis of first-person plural pronouns according to (Kuo, 1999). The semantic references and discourse functions of first-person plural pronouns are given and the mentioned theory is modified in the social sciences.

Chapter Six is named 'moves of response articles'. This Chapter deals with the moves in response articles and their strategies. It is followed by analyzing the e-mail data, and a comparison between the results of these data and the findings of the previous text analysis.

'Conclusion and pedagogical implication' is Chapter Seven of the thesis. It is the last Chapter and presents a review of the whole study and the conclusion of each part. Then the 'pedagogical implication and application' is presented, and at the end some suggestions for further research are given.

1.6. Definition of technical terms

In this section I try to present brief definitions of the main concepts in the present study.

1.6.1. Discourse community

Swales (1990) believes that the concept of 'Discourse community' has so far been principally appropriated by instructors and researchers adopting a 'Social View' (Faigley, 1986) of the writing process.

As it has been mentioned before in this Chapter, Swales proposes six defining characteristics for identifying a group of individuals as a discourse community. These characteristics are: a broadly agreed set of common public goals, mechanisms of intercommunication among its members, using its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback, utilizing and hence possessing one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims, acquiring some specific lexis, and having a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise (1990, pp. 24-27).

1.6.2. Genre

There are many different definitions for the concept of genre in different disciplines. Its definition in each field covers some characteristic features, but Swales (1990) gives a definition of this term in detail, as it was mentioned in section 1.2, which can be applied in all of the disciplines. Among these features are comprising communicative events, sharing some set of communicative purposes, possessing specific genres, and possessing particular conventions for genres (p. 58).

1.6.3. Genre analysis

The aim of genre analysis is to identify the moves and strategies of a genre, the probable order of the moves, and the main linguistic features. The next step is to explain why these features were chosen by expert users of the genre to achieve their communicative purpose (Bhatia, 1993). The results of such form-purpose-explanation