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Department of English Language and Literature

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Clause Complexity in Applied Linguistics Research Articles by Native and Non-Native Writers: Taxis, Expansion and Projection

Supervisor

Farahman Farrokhi (Ph. D)

Advisor

Ali Akbar Ansarin (Ph. D)

By

Sepideh Ghandkaran-Shotorban

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In the Name of God,

the Compassionate,

the Merciful

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Surname: Ghandkaran-Shotorban	**Name:** Sepideh
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Abstract

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has stood the test of time as a model of text analysis. The present literature contains some studies that while taking the 'clause' as the unit of analysis have put into investigation the metafunctions in research articles (RAs) of a single field of study or those of various fields in comparison (Williams, 2006; Durán, 2012; Lorés, 2004; Martínez, 2003). Although 'clause complex' is another unit of SF analysis, by far there has been only one study on RAs where it was the unit of analysis (Sellami Baklouti, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this thesis was to put into analysis the 'taxis', 'expansion', and 'projection' deployed in quantitative and qualitative Applied Linguistics RA abstracts (RAAs) and RA discussions (RADs) by native (N) and non-native (NN) writers. To this end, 40 Applied Linguistics RAs (20 by N English writers and 20 by NN English writers on the sub-fields of Discourse Analysis and Language Assessment) were analyzed according to Halliday & Matthiessen's (2013) 'clause complex' framework. The results indicated that concerning quantitative RAAs and RADs there was a significant difference in the use of 'projection' by Ns and NNs. The findings also showed what types of 'taxis', 'expansion', and 'projection' were deployed by Ns and NNs in their quantitative and qualitative RAAs and RADs. The teachers, university students, translators, and editors of Applied Linguistics could benefit from the outcomes of this thesis in order to produce not only genre but par-genre appropriate sentences.

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List of Abbreviations

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

N: Native

NN: Non-native

RA: Research Article

RAA: Research Article Abstract

RAD: Research Article Discussion

SFL: Systemic Functional Linguistics

Chapter one

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

One of the multitudes of theories that have been taking the academic world by storm is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). It has been employed in a variety of contexts and language-related areas; and it is believed to be an auspicious start in bringing to light the meaning-based operations of discourse and text in various genres. Over the course of many years, this theoretical framework, along with its multi-layered analytical tools, has been applied to the analysis of many genres especially research articles (RAs) (e.g. Ghadessy, 1999; Sellami baklouti, 2011). This thesis is inspired by the fact that when writing, we make not only 'clause simplexes' but 'clause complexes' and, not any less so, by the notion that since making 'clause complexes' is associated with logical metafunction, native (N) and non-native (NN) RA writers may opt for different structural choices in integrating their meaning.

1.1. Background of the study

Discourse analysis is an activity that almost all linguists do in some guise. It has plethora of uses, the most significant of which is its educational applications, particularly in the teaching and analyzing of academic writing (Moore, 2010). As the horizon of discourse analytical methods has been expanded, SFL proves to be vitally important to put into meaning-based analysis the language of various texts. Its main claim is that "the structural choices made in the construction of texts are ultimately derived from the functions that language serves in a context of use" (Hall, Smith, and Wicaksono, 2011, p. 82). It is axiomatic that languages offer a wide supply of structural forms to convey meanings. According to Coffin, Lillis, and O' Halloran (2010), SF linguists stress that "choices in grammar both shape, and are shaped by, the contexts in which people use language …. In this way, context is understood in terms of the linguistic meanings made and vice versa" (p. 3).

Within academic discourse community, language is used in various contexts, one of which is using it to produce RAs in accordance with disciplinary norms. Over the last 20 years, genre analysts, notably those who are concerned with English for Specific Purposes (ESP), have expressed an interest in the macro- and micro-structures of RAs and carried out a burgeoning number of studies in this regard (examples among many are Basturkmen, 2012; Hu & Cao, 2011; Gledhill, 2000). Various studies on RAs also exist based on the perspective of SFL (e.g. Williams, 2006; Durán, 2012; Lorés, 2004; Martínez, 2003). These studies are mainly concerned with metafunctions of language.

In selecting SFL as an analytical tool, besides opting for 'clause' as the unit of investigation, researchers can analyze texts in their choice of 'below', 'above', and 'beyond' the 'clause'. 'Above' the 'clause' or 'clause complex' is one of the areas that have comparatively remained under-explored. In a longitudinal genre-based course, Srinon & White (2007) explored essays of three Thai university students and suggested that bringing frequently to the students' attention Halliday's 'clause complexes' through the text modeling process led to positive writing developments. In other words, their essays became more fluent. Hitherto, the only study on Halliday's clause complexity regarding RAs has been that of Sellami Baklouti's (2011). Dividing the articles into hard and soft sciences (each containing three disciplines) and examining their Abstracts, she concluded that 'clause complexes' were used more in soft Abstracts, and that 'hypotaxis' and 'enhancement' were the most frequently used types of 'taxis' and 'expansion' due to the general exigencies of Abstract writing.

All the above-mentioned articles and many others on SFL that were produced within an elapsed time of almost three decades reveal that SFL as a theoretical- analytical framework covers a large expanse of applications and has potentialities and exploratory-analytic power which need to be considered more often.

1.2. Significance of the study

Since English is the primary medium of communication in academia worldwide, researchers attempt to publish their articles in English to achieve greater visibility and professional improvement. As a result of this, the idea arose that articles by N English writers may be different from those by NN English writers. The present literature contains some studies that take into account this cultural variable (e.g. Hu & Cao, 2011; Mur-Dueñas, 2011; Sheldon, 2011; Loi & Evans, 2010).

Our writings are crammed with not only 'clause simplexes' but 'clause complexes'; RAs are not an exception in this regard. The importance of complexing and the fact that we deploy it in writing and even speaking have academically found expression in studies such as Rukmini, 2010; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Newnham, 2013; and Shibata, 2013. However, there is only one study (Sellami Baklouti, 2011) that investigated the use of clause complexity in RA Abstracts (RAAs) in hard and soft sciences. Although the study presented consolidated results, it did not focus on Applied Linguistics as a soft science. It was also restricted only to the Abstracts.

Therefore, to fill the gap, the present thesis based on Halliday & Matthiessen's (2013) clause complexity framework aims to investigate the use of clause complexity in quantitative Applied Linguistics RAAs and RA Discussions (RADs) by N and NN English writers and qualitative Applied Linguistics RAAs and RA Discussions (RADs) by Ns and NNs. It is essential to mention at the outset that the term Discussion in this thesis is used as an umbrella term for Result, Discussion and Conclusion part-genres.

1.3. Research questions and hypotheses

Research Question 1: Are there any significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'taxis' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of quantitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers?

Null Hypothesis 1: There are no significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'taxis' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of quantitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Alternative Hypothesis 1: There are significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'taxis' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of quantitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Research Question 2: Are there any significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'expansion' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of quantitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers?

Null Hypothesis 2: There are no significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'expansion' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of quantitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Alternative Hypothesis 2: There are significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'expansion' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of quantitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Research Question 3: Are there any significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'projection' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of quantitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers?

Null Hypothesis 3: There are no significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'projection' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of quantitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Alternative Hypothesis 3: There are significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'projection' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of quantitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Research Question 4: Are there any significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'taxis' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of qualitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers?

Null Hypothesis 4: There are no significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'taxis' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of qualitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Alternative Hypothesis 4: There are significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'taxis' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of qualitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Research Question 5: Are there any significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'expansion' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of qualitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers?

Null Hypothesis 5: There are no significant differences in the frequency of the use of 'expansion' in the Abstract and Discussion sections of qualitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Alternative Hypothesis 5: There are significant differences in the frequency of the use of ‘expansion’ in the Abstract and Discussion sections of qualitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Research Question 6: Are there any significant differences in the frequency of the use of ‘projection’ in the Abstract and Discussion sections of qualitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers?

Null Hypothesis 6: There are no significant differences in the frequency of the use of ‘projection’ in the Abstract and Discussion sections of qualitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Alternative Hypothesis 6: There are significant differences in the frequency of the use of ‘projection’ in the Abstract and Discussion sections of qualitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers.

Research Question 7: What types of ‘taxis’, ‘expansion’, and ‘projection’ are frequently used in the Abstract and Discussion sections of quantitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers?

Research Question 8: What types of ‘taxis’, ‘expansion’, and ‘projection’ are frequently used in the Abstract and Discussion sections of qualitative Applied Linguistics RAs by N and NN English writers?

1.4. Definition of the key terms

- **Applied Linguistics**

Richards & Schmidt (2002) defined Applied Linguistics as follows:

> 1 the study of second and foreign language learning and teaching
>
> 2 the study of language and linguistics in relation to practical problems such as LEXICOGRAPHY, TRANSLATION, SPEECH PATHOLOGY, etc. Applied linguistics uses information from sociology, psychology, anthropology, and INFORMATION THEORY as well as from linguistics in order to develop its own theoretical models of language and language use, and then uses this information and theory in practical areas such as syllabus design, SPEECH THERAPY, LANGUAGE PLANNING, STYLISTICS, etc. (p. 28)

- **Clause complex**

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2013), 'clauses' are connected to one another via some kind of logico-semantic relations to form 'clause complexes'. Similarly, Thompson (2004) states that the combination of two or more 'clauses' leads to a larger unit called a 'clause complex'.

- **Elaboration**

It is one of the three sub-types of 'expansion'. "In the formation of clause complexes, one clause elaborates on the meaning of another by further specifying or describing it" (Matthiessen et al., 2010, p. 86). They can be both paratactic and hypotactic in terms of interdependency. For example,