

## Genre Analysis of MA Thesis Abstracts by native and (Iraqi) non-native Speakers of English

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### Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the macro-structure (move-step analysis) of abstract section of MA theses in linguistics. There are two corpora consist of fifteen MA theses written by American native and fifteen others by Iraqi Arab non-native speakers of English. Based on the analysis, some similarities and differences were found regarding cyclicity (move structure) and move-step frequency of occurrence. The findings of the present study are useful for Iraqi non-native writers by presenting the important factors that make them familiar with rhetorical move-step structure of MA thesis abstracts.

**Keywords:** Genre analysis, research article abstracts, move analysis.

### الخلاصة

ان هدف الدراسة الحالية هو البحث عن تحليل الانتقالات والخطوات في فصل الخلاصة الخاص بالرسائل المكتوبة بفرع اللغة. تتكون العينة من قسمين، (١٥) رسالة ماجستير مكتوبة من قبل الأمريكيين الناطقين الاصليين بالإنكليزية، و(١٥) اخرى مكتوبة من قبل العرب العراقيين الناطقين غير الاصليين بالإنكليزية. هنالك بعض التشابه والاختلاف فيما يخص تكرار الانتقالات ونسبة تكرارها. ان نتائج الدراسة الحالية يمكن ان تكون مفيدة في جعل الطلاب العراقيين متأقلمين مع كتابة فصل الخلاصة بشكل افضل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تحليل النوع، ملخصات المادة البحثية، تحليل التحرك.

### 1.Introduction

The analysis of written academic discourse in terms of its rhetorical moves has recently received attention among linguists, educators and professional researchers. There are two main factors that have led to this interest, first, the growth of English in academic contexts, second, the increasing number of international students. These and other important factors are in parallel with the fact that most of the teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) all over the world are non-native speakers of English and that there is a necessity of changing materials in EAP and teacher training courses (Hyland, 2006: 4).

Swales (1990: 15) suggests that in order to enter and be involved in the academic world, writers from different academic disciplines must be acquainted with values and conventions used by discourse community members. If they wanted to be accepted by the readers of

discourse community, they must write appropriately and follow discourse conventions and parameters; otherwise misunderstanding among them would exist.

The problem is centered on Hyland's (2006: 3) suggestion that "there is now compelling evidence across the academic spectrum that disciplines present characteristic and changing forms of communication which students must learn to master in order to succeed". The problem is also described by Duszak (1997: 3) as "Ignorance of, misconception about, the communication styles of others can hinder understanding among academics and ultimately obstruct cooperation and advancement of scholarship". However, the problem arise from the fact that there is a gap in genre knowledge (particularly in text organization) between the American native and the Iraqi Arab non-native academic researchers, especially research article abstract, introduction and conclusion sections in the field of linguistics.

The above mentioned problem can arise the following questions:

1. What cyclicity (move structure) do the American native and Iraqi Arab academic writers employ in their writing of MA thesis abstract section?
2. Is there any difference between the American native and Iraqi Arab non-native speakers of English regarding the frequency of moves and steps in Swales' (1990) model?

The purpose of the present study is to highlight the similarities and differences in move structure between the American native and Iraqi Arab non-native abstract section of MA theses in order to reach conclusions about what gap in genre knowledge can be detected in the writing of the Iraqi Arab academic writers.

## **2.The Concept of Genre**

A genre is defined by Swales and Feak (2009: 1) as "a type of text or discourse designed to achieve a set of communicative purposes". Swales (1981), as cited in Schnurr (2013 :35) describes genre as "a more or less standardized communicative event with a goal or a set of goals mutually understood by the participants in the event". Miller (1994), as cited in Gallagher (2006: 180) defines genre as "the aspect of situated communication that is capable of reproduction, that can be manifested in more than one situation". The above definitions show that genres are categorized according to their communicative purposes.

Bhatia (1993: 13) defines genre as "a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs". Although Bhatia follows Swales' (1990: 58) definition of genre, he, as cited in Deng et al. (2014: 4), adds a psychological aspect of genre which provides a substantial description not only to the nature

of genre, but also to the investigation of the reasons (though non-linguistic) that drive the members of a discourse community to write in the way they do.

Bawarishi and Reiff (2010 : 4) point out that the concept of *genre*, which comes from French, can be traced back to the Latin word *genus*, which stands for "kind" or "class of things". Through its relation to the word *gender*, the word *genre* again can be traced back to the Latin word *gener*, which means "to generate", and the Greek *genos* which means "to be born".

Furthermore, Swales (1990: 33) argues that the word *genre* (according to Webster's Third New International Dictionary) means a type of a small picture representing a scene from domestic life and its growing employment as a fancy way of referring to classes of real world entities. The meaning of genre, however, was introduced in the work of Aristotle who represents genre as literary and classifies it into three categories, poetry, novel, and drama. The New Yorker Dictionary expands the term genre to include other kinds of genres such as Indian Treaties, colonial promotional tracts and theological works (Swales, 1990: 33).

### **3. Approaches to Genre-based Analysis**

Since 1970s, genre has stepped toward the field of linguistic studies. A group of scholars have studied genre in linguistics, such as Halliday (1978), Levinson (1979), Saville-Troike (1982), Miller (1984), Couture (1986), Bazerman (1988), Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993) and Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995). The most influential definitions of genre are proposed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). In contemporary genre studies, there are three approaches which can be seen as complementary, rather than competing approaches:

#### **3.1. Systemic Functional Linguistics:**

The most influential works that have contributed a lot to genre theory, as mentioned by Bawarshi and Reiff (2010: 30), are proposed by a group of scholars, such as Halliday , Hasan, Martin, Christie, Cope and Kalantzis, Kress, Paltridge, Rothery, Ventola, and others. Hyland (2006: 47) claims that systemic functional linguists define genres in terms of their internal linguistic criteria. There are similar linguistic features according to which genres (spoken or written) are classified in terms of their lexico-grammatical features, such as narratives, recounts, arguments and expositions.

#### **3.2. New-rhetorical Approach**

The New-rhetorical or rhetorical genre studies was first introduced to contemporary studies in Carolyn Miller's seminal article "*Genre as a Social Action*" (1984/1994). Its notions, principles and suggestions, as argued by Gruber ( 2013:31 ) were mainly based on

the works of a group of scholars, such as Bazerman 1988; Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; and Freedman and Medway 1994, who generally combine insights from classical rhetoric, literary studies, and communication studies. What characterizes their work is the focus on the importance of the historical contingency and the cultural and historical situatedness of genre.

This approach is described by some scholars as a powerful framework for explaining genre for two reasons, first, as well as its traditional focus on literature, more attention has been paid to non-literary forms (written or spoken), second, rather than its focus only on linguistic regularities of texts, the New-rhetorical has searched for the social, political, and rhetorical actions implied in these texts (Artemeva and Freedman, 2008: 10-11).

Furthermore, the primary focus of the New-rhetorical was on textual regularities, especially in literary works, such as sonnet, tragedy, ode, etc. which were defined in terms of conventions of form and content. New-rhetorical genre studies, in addition, probe further than this, concentrating on the textual features of non-literary texts, such as the purpose, methods, observations of the lab report. Without abandoning traditional definitions of genres as regularized types or kinds of discourse characterized by similarities in content and form, current genre studies concentrate on connecting linguistic and substantive similarities to regularities in human activity (Freedman and Medway, 1994: 1).

### 3.3 English for Specific Purposes

The early stages were generally referred to as the *register analysis*, in which the focus was made on the language of science and technology in academic settings. This approach deals with language varieties, depending on language users and their idiolects. The aim was to investigate how language system could be recognized in different registers as the difference between English of Electronical Engineering and English of Biology (Lesiak-Bielawska (2015: 3).

Lesiak-Bielawska (ibid.) further argues that efforts were exerted to answer the questions concerning the notion of connecting language form to language use, focusing, on the other hand, on language use as the criterion against which teaching materials can be selected. In other words, this approach has given the priority to communication rather than grammatical properties.

The most important contribution of English for Specific Purposes, as further asserted by Ramirez (2015: 382) is that of Swales' (1981) *Aspect of Article Introductions*, which was the beginning of another period in which Swales introduced his new approach through his comprehensive work *Genre Analysis* (1990). This significant work led to and encouraged the

publication of a new series of articles which are considered later as the core of English for Specific purposes.

#### 4. Swales' Rhetorical Moves and Steps

In Genre analysis, the use of rhetorical moves is originated in the works of Swales (1981, 1990) to provide a description of the rhetorical organizational patterns of research articles. The main goal of rhetorical moves is to describe the communicative purposes of a text by means of categorizing the discourse units according to their communicative or rhetorical moves (Biber et al., 2007: 23 ).

Swales (2004: 288) defines move (henceforth: M) as "discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse". Bhatia (1993: 32) defines move as "discriminative elements of generic structure...[depending] upon the communicative purpose (s) that it serves in the genre and that is why it varies from one genre to another". Move is also defined by Biber et al. (2007: 24 ) as " a section of a text that performs a specific communicative function. Each move not only has its own purpose but also contributes to the overall communicative purposes of the genre". Each rhetorical move consists of minor categories called steps, which are otherwise set to achieve the purpose of the move . Moves and steps are functional units in a genre, and can be optional or obligatory. The moves or steps occurring regularly in a genre are obligatory, otherwise, they are optional.

Bruce (2008: 32) points out that text-internal elements of content are analyzed either in relation to rhetorical moves and steps; or in relation to linguistic structures which are related to these moves and steps. Texts within genre, as argued by Freedman and Medway (1994: 124), are characterized by particular rhetorical moves, due to the fact that in modes of argument, communities are different from one another in employing rhetorical moves; and within the community itself one type of discourse is different from another.

The concept of rhetorical moves has gained importance in English for Specific Purposes during the period which extends from (1981) till the present. There was a shift from specific lexicon of technical and scientific texts towards the focus on rhetorical uses of language. Swales (1990) Creating a Research model (CARS) has a noticeable influence on genre studies in English for Specific Purposes and on the teaching of academic writings. This influence includes not only international or first language students, but also professional writers whose aim is to publish international journals (Lesiak-Bielawska, 2015: 7).

## 5. Theses and Dissertations

These genres have the same communicative purposes and the same audience, enabling students to leave the university world to enter another one (Swales, 1990: 187). Theses or dissertations are the genres which are submitted in support for an academic degree or professional qualification, introducing the researcher's study or findings. The word "thesis" is sometimes associated with the part of bachelor's or master's degree. Whereas dissertation is for the most part associated with the degree of a doctorate, whereas in other contexts, the reverse is true. A thesis or dissertation consists mainly of various chapters, introduction, literature review, findings, etc. They are different in their structure according to the disciplines whether arts, humanities, technology, sciences, etc. (Swales, 1990: 187).

### 6.1. Data Description

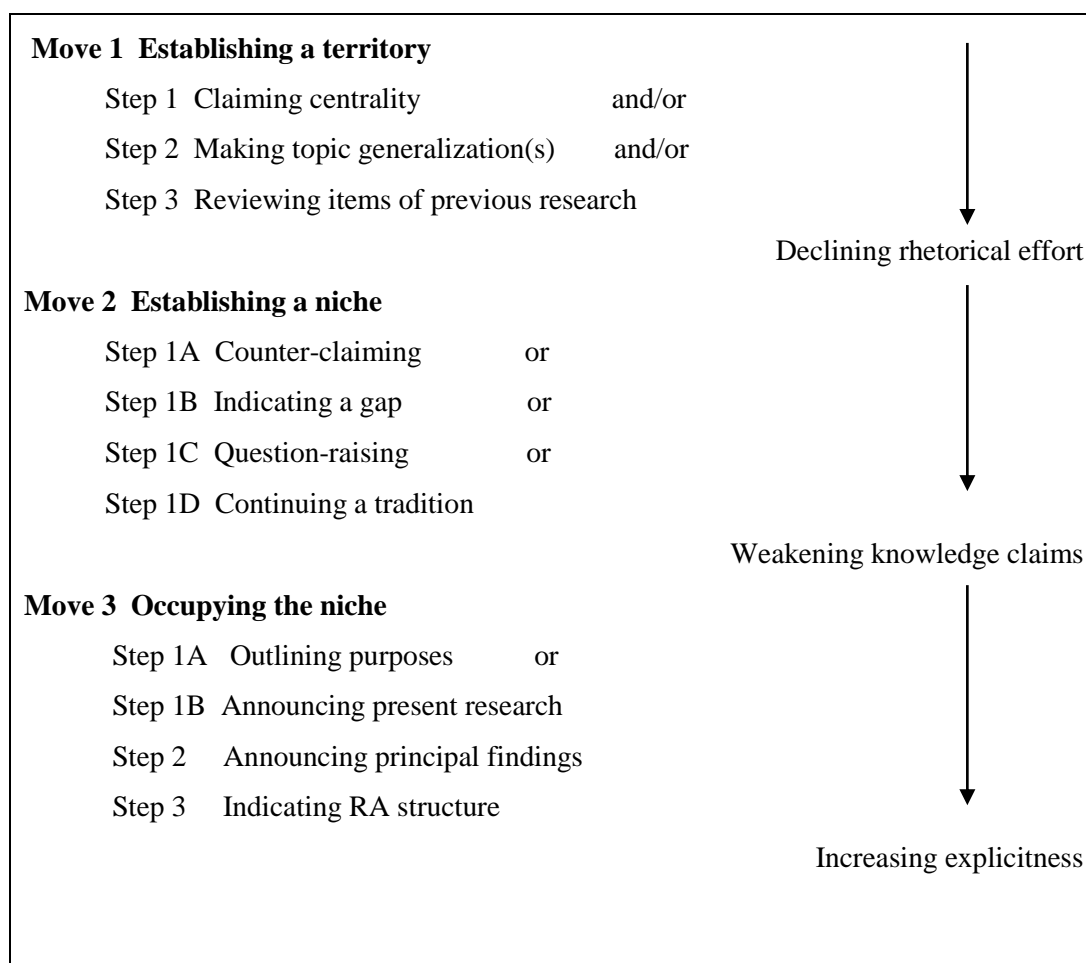
Two sets of data are used in the present study. The total number of data is thirty English MA theses, fifteen are written by American native and fifteen others by Iraqi Arab non-native speakers of English. The American native MA theses are all taken from Portland University. The Iraqi Arab data is taken from different Iraqi Universities, such as Baghdad university, Basra University, Mosul University, etc. The data is limited to the discipline of language and linguistics.

### 6.2. Data Analysis

In order to identify the similarities and differences of moves and steps in MA thesis abstract sections in the two languages, American English and Iraqi Arabic. The present study uses qualitative and quantitative data analyses methods. First, the two sets of data were examined quantitatively by the means of counting each instance of moves. Then, the function of each move in Swales' (1990) model was illustrated qualitatively. The analysis of the American native and Iraqi Arab data was carried out in two main stages. In the first stage, the cyclicity (move structure) was identified. In the second stage, the frequency of moves and steps was investigated to reach at similarities and differences between the two sets of data.

**7. Model of the Analysis:** The adopted model in the present study is Swales' (1990) model. This model consists of three major moves. Each move in Swales (1990) model consists of optional steps.

Figure (1): The CARS Model for Research Article Introductions (1990).



These moves and steps are illustrated as follows:

### -Move 1 Establishing a territory

#### -Step 1 Claiming centrality:

*Claiming centrality* is achieved through a number of ways, either by claiming interest, importance of the study, for example:

Recently, there has been a spate of *interest in* how to...(Swales,1990: 144)

#### -Step 2 Making topic generalization(s)

Biber, et. al. (2007:26) claims that Step 2 *Making a topic generalization* can be achieved through a neutral kind of general statement presenting a more general idea or information about the topic that the research deals with, for example:

There is now *much evidence* to support the hypothesis that...(ibid.: 146)

#### -Step 3 Reviewing items of previous research

Swales and Feak (1993: 180) state that this step is more important than the other steps because authors are always in need to put their research in relation to other researches,

claiming what has been found or who has found it, for example: Brie (1988) showed that the moon is made of cheese.

**-Move 2 Establishing a niche**

Shehzad (2008: 25-27) states that researchers, by indicating a gap, attempt to convince their readers of the demand of their study. It is either:

**-Step 1A Counter-claiming** is used to introduce weaknesses in previous research, for example:

However, the previously mentioned methods *suffer from some limitations*.

**-Step 1B Indicating a gap** is used to introduce the problem of the study, for example:

*A key problem in many...is...* (Swales, 1990: 147).

**-Step 1C Question-raising** is used to introduce a question about the study, for example:

*A question remains whether...* (ibid.).

**-Step 1D Continuing a tradition** is signaled by logical connectors, such as therefore, hence, etc., for example:

*These differences need to be analyzed...*

**-Move 3 Occupying the niche** is used to direct Move 2 *Establishing a niche* to the research content in order to justify the present study. It is either:

**-Step 1A --Outlining purposes** in this step authors state their purposes behind which the reasons are laid to drive them to be involved in the present study, for example: *The purpose of this study...* (Swales, 1990: 147).

**-Step 1B Announcing present research** is used to describe the aims in terms of what the research sets out to do or accomplish, for example:

*This paper evaluates...*(ibid.).

**-Step 2 Announcing principal findings** is used to introduce the findings of the study, for example:

*Our results indicate that...* (ibid.).

**-Step 3 Indicating RA structure** is used to describe the structure of the study, for example:

*This paper is structured as follows...*(Swales, 1990: 147).

## 8. Results

### 8.1. Cyclicity (move structure)

Cyclicity is defined by Shehzad (2008: 46) as the repetition of the same move more than once but in different place of the MA thesis abstract. Cyclicity, on the other hand,



depends on the length of the abstract, so the longer the abstract is the greater the possibility of cyclicity. The other factor that influences the occurrence of cyclicity is the discipline in which it is viewed. So if the field consists of several connected topics, then cyclicity is preferred. The other factor that effect the occurrence of cyclicity is its physical feature, the total number of words in the introduction (ibid.).

In table (1), cyclicity (move structure) of the MA thesis abstracts in both languages is presented. The first three columns represent the number of MA thesis abstracts, move structure and the number of move cycles per each MA thesis in the American native data. The second three columns represent the move structure in the Iraqi Arab data. The average of move cycle in each data is counted via the total number of move cycles (18 in the American and 40 in the Iraqi Arab data) divided by the total number of MA theses (15).

**Table (1): Cyclicity ( move structure) in the American native and Iraqi Arab data.**

N	American native MA thesis abstracts		Iraqi Arab non-native MA thesis abstracts	
	Move structure	Move cycle	Move structure	Move cycle
1	M3	0	M3	0
2	M3	0	M1-M3-M1	1
3	M1-M3	0	M3-M2-M3	1
4	M1-M3	0	M3-M2-M3	1
5	M1-M2-M3	0	M3-M1-M3	1
6	M3-M2-M3	1	M1-M3-M2-M3	1
7	M3-M2-M3	1	M1-M3-M1-M3	2
8	M3-M1-M3	1	M1-M3-M1-M3	2
9	M2-M3-M1-M3	1	M1-M3-M1-M3-M1	3
10	M1-M3-M2-M3	1	M1-M3-M2-M3-M2-M3	3
11	M1-M2-M1-M3	1	M1-M3-M2-M3-M2-M3	3
12	M1-M2-M3-M2-M3	1	M1-M3-M1-M3-M2-M1-M3	4
13	M3-M1-M3-M1-M3	2	M3-M1-M2-M3-M2-M3-M2-M3	5
14	M2-M3-M1-M3-M1-M3-M1	4	M1-M3-M1-M3-M1-M2-M3-M2-M3	6
15	M1-M3-M1-M3-M1-M3-M2-M3	5	M1-M2-M3-M2-M1-M3-M1-M3-M1-M3	7
Total		18	Total	40
		1.2 Move cycle per each RA abstract		2.66 Move cycle per each RA abstract

**A: Patterns shared by both data:**

1.The first shared pattern is (**M3**) which accounts for (13.33%) of the American native and (6.66%) of the Iraqi Arab non-native data.

2. The second pattern is (M3-M2-M3) which is recognized in (13.33%) of the American and Iraqi Arab data.

3. The patterns (M3-M1-M3) and (M1-M3-M2-M3) are shared by (6.66%) of the American native and Iraqi Arab non-native data.

#### B: Patterns not shared by either data:

1. The patterns (M1-M3), (M1-M2-M3), (M2-M3-M1-M3), (M1-M2-M1-M3), M1-M2-M3-M2-M3), (M3-M1-M3-M1-M3), (M2-M3-M1-M3-M1-M3-M1) and (M1-M3-M1-M3-M1-M3-M2-M3) are all recognized with (6.66%) in the American data.

2. In the Iraqi Arab non-native data, the two patterns (M1-M3-M1-M3) and (M1-M3-M2-M3-M2-M3) account for (13.33%) of the abstracts. Other patterns, such as (M1-M3-M1), (M1-M3-M1-M3-M1), (M1-M3-M1-M3-M2-M1-M3), (M3-M1-M2-M3-M2-M3-M2-M3), (M1-M3-M1-M3-M1-M2-M3-M2-M3) and (M1-M2-M3-M2-M1-M3-M1-M3-M1-M3) are recognized with (6.66%) each.

3. Only the American native data follows the normal order of move structure (M1-M2-M3) with a percentage of (6.66%).

4. The move cycle per each MA thesis abstract is (2.66) in the Iraqi Arab and (1.2) in the American native data.

## 7.2 Move and Step Analysis

Table (2) shows move-step frequency in both data. The percentage of each move and step is counted through dividing the number of frequency by the number of MA theses (fifteen), multiplied by 100.

**Table (2): Move and step frequency of MA thesis abstracts by American native and Iraqi data**

Variables	English abstracts		Iraqi abstracts	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Move 1 Establishing a territory</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>73.33</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>80</b>
Step 1 Claiming centrality	2	13.33	5	33.33
Step 2 Making topic generalization(s)	9	60	12	80
Step3 Reviewing items of previous research	2	13.33	2	13.33
<b>Move 2 Establishing a niche</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>60</b>
Step 1A Counter-claiming	3	20	2	13.33
Step 1B Indicating a gap	8	53.33	7	46.66
Step 1C Question-raising	1	6.66	0	0

Step 1D Continuing a tradition	0	0	0	0
<b>Move 3 Occupying the niche</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>
Step 1A Outlining purposes	3	20	10	66.66
Step 1B Announcing present research	15	100	14	93.33
Step 2 Announcing principal findings	14	93.33	12	80
Step 3 Indicating RA structure	0	0	7	46.66

As to move frequency, table (2) reveals the following results:

1. A difference can be noted between the American native and Iraqi Arab non-native regarding move 1 *Establishing a territory*. It is (73.33%) in the American native and (80%) in the Iraqi Arab non-native data.
2. No difference can be recognized between the American native and Iraqi Arab no-native data in the frequency of move 2 *Establishing a niche*. It accounts for (60%) of both data.
3. No difference can be noted between the two sets of data regarding Move 3 *Occupying the niche*. It accounts for (100%) of both data.

**As to step frequency, table (1) suggests the following results:**

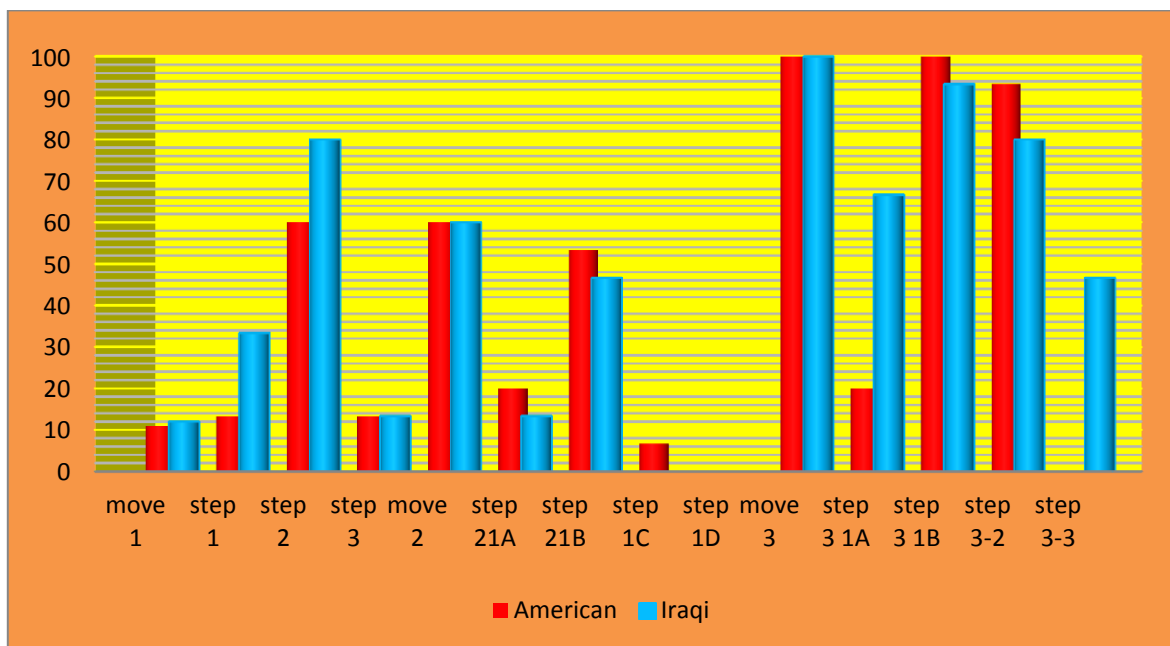
1. The frequency of Step 1 *Claiming centrality* in the Iraqi Arab non-native data is higher than that in the American native. It is (33.33%) and (13.33%) respectively.
2. A difference can be noted regarding Step 2 *Making topic generalization(s)*. It is (60%) in the American native and (80%) in the Iraqi Arab non-native RA abstracts.
3. No difference can be recognized in both data in the frequency of Step 3 *Reviewing items of previous research*. It accounts for (13.33) of both sets of data.
4. There is a difference between the American native and Iraqi Arab non-native regarding Move 2 Step 1A *Counter-claiming*. It accounts for (20%) in the American and (13.33) in the Iraqi Arab non-native data.
5. A difference can be noted in the frequency of Step 1B *Indicating a gap*. It is (53.33%) in the American native and (46.66%) in the Iraqi Arab non-native data.
6. The step of 1C *Question-raising*, though never exists in the Iraq Arab non-native data, accounts for (6.66%) of the American native ones.
7. Move 2 Step 1D *Continuing a tradition* never exists in both sets of data.
8. The frequency of Move 3 Step 1A *Outlining purposes* in the Iraqi Arab non-native RA abstracts is than that in the American native ones. It is (20%) and (66.66%) respectively.
9. The frequency of Move 3 Step 1B *Announcing present research* account for (100%) of the American native and (93.33%) of the Iraqi Arab non-native data.

10. Table (1) suggests a difference in the frequency of Move 3 Step 2 *Announcing principal findings*. It is (93.33%) in the American native and (80%) in the Iraqi RA abstracts.

11. Move 3 Step 3 Indicating RA structure, though never exists in the American native, accounts for (46.66%) of the Iraqi Arab RA abstracts.

**Figure (2) summarizes the difference between the two sets of data in the frequency of moves and steps.**

**Figure (2): Move and step frequency in the American native and Iraqi Arab data**



## 9. Conclusion:

1. The Iraqi Arab academic writers are not aware of the normal order of move structure (**M1-M2-M3**), since no MA thesis abstract follows the normal order.
2. There is a general tendency for the Iraqi Arab academic writers to overuse the general ideas or information about the topic.
3. The Iraqi Arab academic writers are not aware of how to identify the problem of their study.
4. From a pedagogical perspective, there is a need for the Iraqi Arab academic writers to be aware of how to employ Move 2 *Establishing a niche* which is used to identify the problem of the study.

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