UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

RHETORICAL STRUCTURE IN THE PROBLEM STATEMENT SECTION OF IRANIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' RESEARCH PROJECTS

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By

ZAHRA TARVIRDIZADEH

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

December 2018

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to:

My Dear Mother, Fatemeh;

My Beloved Supportive Husband, Bahram Izadi;

My Cherished Children, Ensieh and Mohammad Hossein

Who have provided me with care and compassion throughout my study journey,

Because, without their endless love, support and encouragement, I would have never

been able to complete this important step in my life.
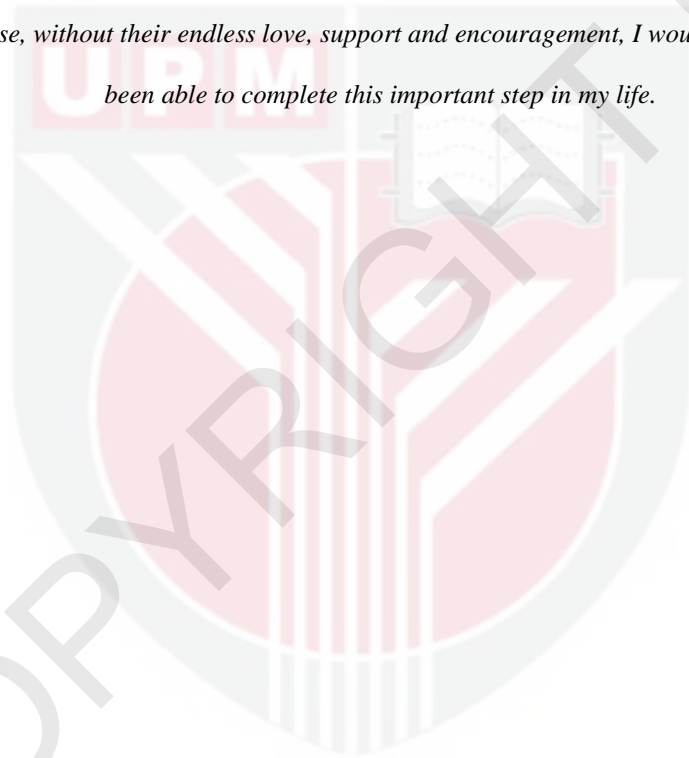
Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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December 2018

Chairman : **Vahid Nimehchisalem, PhD**
Faculty : **Modern Languages and Communication**

One of the criteria that can influence the quality of postgraduate students' academic writing is the way they organize their ideas in their research projects and theses. Among the various parts of a thesis, the Problem Statement (PS) is the most important part as it presents the initial reason why the research project should be conducted. This study focuses on the structure of the PS, since it has rarely been considered as an independent section in earlier research. Swales' (1990) Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model was used to analyze the PS sections written by Iranian postgraduate students. In this regard, based on Pho's (2013) classification, the specific types of linguistic features associated with each move and step were identified besides exploring their writers' perceptions of the content and the organization of a proper PS. To meet these objectives, 30 MA research projects were collected from purposively selected Iranian postgraduate students. The students who had written these were PhD students in two different universities in Iran while this study was in progress. Move analysis was used to analyze the rhetorical moves of the PS sections of the research projects. Following Pho (2013), the linguistic features as important signals of moves were identified. Thematic analysis of the interviews indicated the students' perceptions. The findings showed that the rhetorical structures of the PS sections of the Iranian EFL postgraduate students included the expected moves and all moves, and their respective steps were identified linguistically in all the samples although their sequence and arrangement were not the same as what is expected in the model. The obligatory moves were M1 *'Establishing a Territory'* and M2 '*Establishing a Niche'*. The results demonstrated that the writers of the PSs were more concerned with M1 *'Establishing a Territory'* rather than M2 *'Establishing a Niche'*. Although, the cyclic and embedded moves were defined in the rhetorical structure of the PSs but most of them were anomalous or ill-structured. In contrast, the results of the thematic analysis showed that the students have misconceptions toward the content and organization of the PS section. The results help the understanding of the nature and function of this genre and can have important implications for EFL instructors. The study has theoretical contributions, the most

significant one of which is that the CARS model is applicable to define and analyze the rhetorical structure of PSs even though originally it was developed for the purpose of analyzing the whole introduction section.

Keywords: Genre analysis, Problem statement, Rhetorical structure, Swales' CARS model.

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Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

STRUKTUR RETORIKAL DALAM SEKSYEN PERNYATAAN MASALAH PROJEK PENYELIDIKAN PELAJAR PASCASISWAZAH IRAN

Oleh

ZAHRA TARVIRDIZADEH

Disember 2018

Pengerusi : **Vahid Nimehchisalem, PhD**
Fakulti : **Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi**

Salah satu kriteria yang mempengaruhi kualiti penulisan akademik pelajar pascasiswazah ialah cara mereka mengorganisasi idea mereka dalam projek penyelidikan mereka. Antara pelbagai bahagian sesebuah tesis, Pernyataan Masalah (PS) merupakan bahagian yang paling penting kerana ia mengutarakan sebab awal sesebuah projek penyelidikan harus dilaksanakan. Kajian ini memfokuskan struktur PS, disebabkan ia jarang dianggap sebagai seksyen yang independen dalam penyelidikan lepas. Model Bina Ruang Penyelidikan Swales (1990) (CARS) telah digunakan bagi menganalisis seksyen PS yang ditulis oleh pelajar pascasiswazah Iran. Dalam hal ini, berdasarkan klasifikasi Pho (2013) jenis ciri linguistik yang spesifik yang berkaitan dengan setiap gerakan dan langkah telah dikenal pasti di samping meneliti persepsi penulis mengenai kandungan dan organisasi sesebuah PS yang betul. Bagi mencapai objektif tersebut, 30 projek penyelidikan MA telah dikumpul daripada pelajar pascasiswazah Iran terpilih secara purposif. Pelajar tersebut merupakan pelajar PhD yang sedang menulis projek penyelidikan di dua buah universiti yang berbeza di Iran ketika kajian ini sedang dijalankan. Analisis gerakan telah digunakan untuk menganalisis gerakan retorikal seksyen PS projek penyelidikan. Analisis tematik temu bual menunjukkan persepsi pelajar. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa struktur retorikal bagi seksyen PS pelajar siswazah EFL Iran merangkumi gerakan yang dijangkakan dan semua gerakan dan langkah respektif mereka telah dikenal pasti secara linguistik dalam semua sampel walaupun urutan dan susunan mereka tidak sama seperti yang dijangkakan dalam model. Gerakan obligatori ialah M1, iaitu Pembangunan Kawasan dan M2, iaitu Pembangunan Niche. Dapatan memperlihatkan bahawa penulis lebih mementingkan M1 iaitu Pembangunan Kawasan daripada M2 iaitu Pembangunan Niche. Walaupun gerakan siklik dan tersemat telah didefinisikan dalam struktur retorikal PS tetapi kebanyakan mereka adalah beranomali dan tidak berstruktur. Sebaliknya, dapatan analisis tematik menunjukkan bahawa pelajar mempunyai tanggapan yang salah mengenai kandungan dan organisasi seksyen PS. Dapatan ini membantu pemahaman mengenai sifat dan fungsi genre tersebut dan ia mempunyai implikasi yang penting bagi

instruktur EFL. Kajian ini mempunyai sumbangan teoretikal, yang paling signifikan ialah model CARS yang dapat diaplikasikan bagi menghuraikan dan menganalisis struktur teoretikal walaupun awalnya ia telah dibangunkan bagi tujuan menganalisis keseluruhan seksyen pengenalan.Kata kunci: Analisis Genre, Pernyataan masalah, Struktur retorikal, Model CARS Swales

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Last but not least, I would like to thank my family: my husband, my daughter and my son for supporting me spiritually throughout writing this thesis.
Thank You,

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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This is to confirm that:
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Signature:	
Name of Member of Supervisory Committee:	Professor Dr. Ain Nadzimah Binti Abdullah

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LISTS OF ABBREVIATIONS

CARS	Create-A-Research-Space
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
ESAP	English for Specific Academic Purposes
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
LIS	Library Information Science
MA	Master's degree
M	Move
P	Participant
PS	Problem Statement
RA	Research Article
RQ	Research Question
S	Step
TEFL	Teaching English as the Foreign Language

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a background about the importance of learning English language and its role in academic settings. Then, the statement of the problem is followed by objectives of the study and research questions. Next, the conceptual framework, the significance of the study and the operational definition of key terms are presented. It finally ends with a chapter summary.

1.1   Background of the Study

In the past years, English as a Second Language (ESL)/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writers' thesis/research project writing has attracted much attention as a crucial skill in academic setting. English writing skill is an increasingly important area of applied linguistics, especially because of the position of English as an ascendant language among scholars in the world. According to Rashid and Heng (2008), "Writing remains a skill that is often seen as very important as it has been regarded to be a reliable indicator of language use" (p.119). English language is the medium of instruction and assessment used in the delivery of the programs and scholarly communication in most international universities (Sheldon, 2013), and this might create issues for its users from different backgrounds. That is, the non-native English language users (like EFL/ESL learners whose first language is not English) as the actors (Hyland, 2015) or members of the discourse community (Swales, 1990), have different background and culture which influence their language activities like writing. The influence of different backgrounds and first language on the writers' performance may create difficulties for them (Williams, 2005).

The issues may be revealed in non-natives' text organization and rhetorical preferences in writing which are not the same as that of the English language (Sheldon, 2013). This matter can also be the result of the interference of the rhetorical structure of non-natives' first language with their writing instruction. In this regard, an accurate rhetorical framework is needed to clarify the scopes and dimensions of how to write in various genres for specific academic purposes which can acknowledge both native and non-native writers in the discourse community (Swales, 1990).

Discourse communities, as defined by Swales (1990), are "socio-rhetorical networks that form to work towards sets of common goals" (p. 9). Having knowledge about specific genres is the essential feature of being a member of these communities. Swales (1990) defines a genre as a possession of the discourse communities. For Swales (1990), genres refer to communicative events including texts whether written or spoken. That is, "a collocation with the communicative event; a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes" (Swales, 1990, p. 46). It is necessary here to state that the analysis of the

written texts of the Problem Statement (PS) section as a genre, along with the writers' perceptions of the rhetorical structure of the PS, is the main goal in conducting this study.

In general, the most important feature of writing skill in a university setting is the development of the ability to write various genres for different purposes. To clarify this matter, Jessica Williams (2005) mentions the differences between English as the Second Language (L2), English as the Foreign Language (EFL), and native writers. Then, she characterizes the academic writing by some features. First, it should be quite explicit; the reader should be able to understand the writer's message easily, which is the point that most linguists such as Connor (2004) have emphasized. Connor (2004) declares that English rhetorical structure is linear, producing the message to the readers directly, with this being the writer's responsibility. That is, the writer's message(s) should be clear and understandable for the readers, and it is the writers' responsibility to write a text in such a way for readers to understand it easily.

The second characteristic of academic writing is having the form of an argument (Williams, 2005). An argument, defined as a reason in the form of a claim, requires creating a form of academic writing, such as an academic paper, a research article, or even a dissertation, that is proven by evidence. This form of writing convinces readers to accept the writer's claim that the topic selected is a researchable academic issue presented as a problem in the university setting (Creswell, 2014).

Finally, the academic writing should "objectively review, evaluate, and present evidence to validate their views" (Williams, 2005, p. 22), rather than conveying a writer's opinions or emotions.

Among academic writing, thesis writing is the most challenging task (Nimehchisalem et al. 2015) for non-native writers like EFL/ESL students. It is for that the rhetorical structures of their first languages vary differ the rhetorical structure of English language. Despite the many investigations on the rhetorical structures of the academic writing of EFL/ESL postgraduate students, "L2 postgraduate thesis remains something of a neglected genre" (Hyland, 2004, p.134). Furthermore, among the various parts of the proposals, research projects, and theses, the PS section, despite its fundamental role in a study, has a small number of investigations among academics (Ibrahim & Nambiar, 2011). Previous studies (e.g. Hernon and Schwartz, 2007; Jalilifar et al., 2011; Metoyer-Duran and Hernon, 1994; Stansbury, 2002) have reported that the PS has a crucial role to conduct theses and research projects. Samraj (2008) has pointed out that MA and PhD students should be aware of this.

The PS is "the crystallization of the issue, the essence of what I am doing" (Metoyer-Duran & Hernon, 1994, p. 107). An academic issue as a problem points to deficiency in the real world or in the academic setting. This problem then should be then supported by previous research (Creswell, 2014). In other words, this issue or problem proposed by academic writers needs a response to the query, what do I want to prove? Consequently,

the PS is a basic reason to conduct a research and its response would be provided by the whole (Hernon & Schwartz, 2007; Stansbury, 2002). This points to the importance of the PS. According to Nenty (2009), everything that goes into a study must be done by the presentation, exploration, and proof of the PS (Nenty, 2009). Selamat (2008) points to the PS as the heart of any research project and thesis. And Nenty (2009) emphasizes that "a strong start for any research is possible when the researchers begin with an unmistakably clear statement of the problem" (p. 21).

Most importantly, a satisfactory level of writing proficiency is expected from postgraduate students in academic settings. They should present an understandable PS since "lack of writing proficiency can be a barrier to academic and professional success" (Williams, 2005, p. 1). Adequate writing skill enables postgraduate students as the members of discourse community (Swales, 1990) to convey the various texts for different purposes and different audiences. More importantly, writing skill is not only having the linguistic ability. In fact, in addition of the linguistic accuracy, the rhetorical structure is important in writing which is not the same in all languages. The rhetorical structure usually varies across languages and cultures (Kaplan, 1966, as cited in Nimehchisalem et al. 2016). Elena Sheldon (2011) points out that writers of non-English-speaking background are disadvantaged in that they "have to compete for academic recognition in a language other than their own" that can be revealed in their writing structure (p. 238). The dissimilarity can influence logical argument as a culture-bound. It means, one thing may be regarded as "a logical argument in one language that it may not be judged to be so in another" (Nimehchisalem et al., 2016, p. 174). Consequently, this matter shows that different languages have different rhetorical structures which possibly will generate problems for EFL/ESL writing.

According to Hernon and Schwartz (2007, p. 309), "research is like dealing with a set of propositions in a debate or an argument adhering to the principles of logic," and obtaining approval of the conclusion is the researcher's main aim (Nimehchisalem et al., 2016, p.174). Among thesis propositions, the most important proposition is PS. It is also the first one which should be accepted before other propositions. Having reviewed many investigations which have analyzed each part of the thesis separately, on the different parts of a thesis like abstract, introduction, literature review, finding, and discussion, show that a few studies have focused on the PS, an area which needs to be investigated (Hernon & Schwartz, 2007).

There is an agreement among social scientists that inadequate performance of L2 students to convey a piece of writing in an academic setting is the result of their lack of preparation for English writing (Varghese & Abraham, 1998). Moreover, the results of analyzing ESL university students' writing instructions show "they can master terminology to present a structure to inform their writing" (Varghese & Abraham, 1998, p. 16). The explicit instruction is needed to prepare writers to write in English because English has a specific rhetorical structure which differs from other languages, like Persian. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest to compare the rhetorical structure of the EFL writers' writing with native writers (Jalilifar, Firuzmand, & Roshani, 2011; Loi & Sweetnam Evans, 2010; Ozturk, 2007; Sheldon, 2011) that this

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has been also included Iranian EFL postgraduate students' writing abilities in academic setting (KamyabiGol & Rashid, 2014; Karimnia, 2013; Khodabandeh, 2014; Namvar, Nor, Ibrahim, & Mustafa, 2012). The process of English academic writing is very complex and challenging for Iranian students (KamyabiGol & Rashid, 2014) that also has a direct relationship with the writers' perceptions and knowledge in conveying various parts of a research article, research project and thesis.

From various sections and sub-sections of a research project as a form of academic writing, the PS is more likely to include the mentioned three characteristics. Because this section as the problem or as an academic issue must be clear in order to be understandable, it has to be proved by evidence, and be objectively reviewed and evaluated. This is the main reason to conduct a research.

The Create-A-Research-Space in Academic (CARS) proposed by Swales (1990) is an analytical framework or tool that helps scholars look up academic passages with searched move functions as well as linguistics features as keywords. The result obtained from analyzing PS section based on CARS model is supposed to provide valuable pedagogical experiences and implications to postgraduate investigators for having an appropriate framework which can simplify the writing.

Likewise, a writing pattern reflects the writer's thinking pattern (Connor,1996). This study extends the application of the genre analysis to examine the rhetorical structure of the problem statement section of Iranian EFL scholars' MA research projects and exploring the PhD scholars' perceptions.

Overall, what has been mentioned so far about writing structure shows that writers with different background, cultures, and views represent different rhetorical structures in their writing (Connor, 2004; Hyland, 2015). The different rhetorical structures may influence writing in English academically. This matter may also become a challenging task for EFL/ESL writers. Most EFL writers like Iranian students face difficulty to write academically which motivates researchers to conduct research in this area. Teaching and learning foreign language are limited to classroom of schools, universities, and private institutes in EFL context such as Iran. In Iran, the English language learners do not have chance and opportunity to practice and improve their second language abilities in the social context. This problem creates some difficulties in writing for them. In 2011, Ibrahim and Nambiar conducted an action research to address the problem with a focus on the PS written by EFL international postgraduate students. The participants were International students who were common in background as EFL educators including Iranians, Iraqis, Jordanians, and China. Their findings showed that these students faced difficulties "for the task, citing cross-cultural limitations stemming from differences in teaching and learning styles vis-a-vis here and their home countries" (Ibrahim & Nambiar, 2011, p. 1714). It is worth mentioning that the setting of Ibrahim and Nambiar's research was UKM University of Malaysia as the ESL context where learners have more chance to improve their language acquisition compared to the learners in Iran as the EFL context. That is, although, the participants were international students with

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more opportunity to reveal their skills in English language in an ESL context, they still face difficulties. In this regard, the EFL students' difficulties from a non-English medium of instruction become more tangible where they must be skillful in English. Moreover, these difficulties are tangible in the EFL postgraduate students' own context except in their speaking like interview and written products such as essay, research article, and dissertation.

The problems regarding the rhetorical structure of Iranian EFL writers can have various reasons. The first reason is for the context. English language is taught and practice only in high schools and universities in Iran, so the students lack to practice this language outside the classroom. This matter does not allow them to have sufficient practiced to improve their language skills. Secondly, the Iranian EFL students are not explicitly taught to structure their writing. Finally, apart from a lack of explicit writing instruction in Iranian educational system (Khodabande, 2014), the learners' writing instructions may be influenced by some factors such as their first language patterns and the writer's beliefs and perceptions. Thus, these learners' perceptions toward rhetorical structure of writing a piece of writing like PS is the focus of the current study.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

Although EFL writers' abilities and difficulties have been explored from various aspects by many researchers, their academic writing problems (Mousavi, Salehi, & Kashefian-Naeeini, 2011) require more investigations. While writing is still a challenging task (Rahman, Darus, & Amir, 2017), investigating EFL postgraduate students' academic writing skills is a continuing concern among researchers. Furthermore, academic writing skill demands writing different types of genres. Genre or genre analysis is a major area of interest within the field of applied linguistics since it can provide support for EFL/ESL writers who face difficulties in writing in academic settings (Pouladian, Bagheri1 & Sadighi, 2017; Saadat and Dastgerdi, 2014; Sharafi Nejad et al., 2016). Moreover, thesis writing demands the skilled writers to represent each part of a thesis which demands the ability to write in specific genres (Mousavi et al., 2015).

Among various parts of the thesis explored vastly by many researchers throughout the world, the PS has attracted little attention from previous researchers (Jalilifar et al., 2011). The PS, as an important section in a research article or thesis, which includes the topic of the study, the research problem within this topic, a justification for the problem based on the past research and practice, "deficiencies or shortcomings of past research or practical knowledge, and the importance of addressing for diverse audiences" (Creswell, 2014, p. 12).

Regarding the important role of the PS in proposals, research projects, and theses, little attention has been paid to the rhetorical structure of this section (Jalilifar et al., 2011). Khodabandeh (2014) points to the lack of explicit instruction for learning English in Iranian educational system. She states that Iranian students have difficulties to convey

different parts of a thesis/research project in accordance with the rhetorical structure of English language. Much of the research up to now has examined the rhetorical structure of written texts by Iranian EFL students, but different conclusions have been made about their difficulties (e.g. Khodabandek, 2014; (Sharafi Nejad et al., 2016). Khodabandeh concluded that explicit instruction assisted students to gain control over genre and the experimental group to outperform the other groups" (2014, p. 974). Sharafi-Nejad et al. (2016) state Iranian EFL students have to make enormous efforts to be able to write in a rhetorically well-structured way. The problem becomes more highlighted in an academic context where the writer should be able to create well-structured technical texts in a cohesive manner.

In considering the rhetorical structure of the PS sections of the EFL writers' theses, the studies have failed to recognise the regular rhetorical structure for this part (e.g Jalilifar et al., 2011). Hernon and Schwartz (2007) hypothesize that the rhetorical structure of the PSs is absent or incomplete in the related methodology literature. The PS must clearly indicate the previous and former deficiencies if the intention is to support a research study (Hernon & Schwartz, 2007). To expand the knowledge about the rhetorical structure of a PS, the academic writers' perceptions are also important (Metoyer-Duran & Hernon, 1994a).

The current study aims to investigate the postgraduate students' perceptions toward the content and organization of the PS apart from identifying the rhetorical structure of the PS written by Iranian postgraduate students. Hopefully, findings of the study will reveal the deficiencies and shortcomings to increase the postgraduate students' awareness about rhetorical structure of the PS to writing of this part simpler.

Up to the present time, there has been no explicit framework in writing a PS (Hernon and Schwartz, 2007; Jalilifar et al., 2011). This gap has been revealed for the lack of research on rhetorical structure of the PS accurately. To emphasize the important role of the PS, Selamat (2008) claims that "the heart of any research project is the problem" and "researchers get off a strong start when they begin with an unmistakably clear statement of the problem" (p. 21). Thus, the debate about rhetorical structure of any research project written text shows that there is a lack of studies on the rhetorical structure of the PS as a genre. The reason behind a lack of literature on a well-structured PS section might be that "Research methods textbooks tend to emphasize methodologies for data collection and to ignore (or provide cursory coverage of) the PS" (Metoyer-Duran and Hernon1994, p. 105). Everything in the research must be a presentation, investigation and proof of the PS (Nenty, 2009). Hence, a PS must be conveyed with accurate rhetorical structure to conduct a successful research otherwise, an ill-structured PS may influence the whole research. Once a problem or academic issue has been presented, proof should be provided by citing the relevant literature.

As mentioned, apart from the specific rhetorical structure for the PS as a genre or piece of writing, literature shows that there is relationship between writing and writers' beliefs, knowledge, and perceptions (Hyland, 2004; Sheldon, 2013). Kay and Dudley-evans

(1998) demonstrate that despite many studies on 'genre', the significance of writers' beliefs and perceptions are remained controversial. They highlighted this matter by stating that "we think about the concept before using it and consider carefully how we put it into practice" (p. 313) because "one effective way for conveying one's thoughts and ideas is through writing (Kamyabigol and Rashid, 2014, p. 100). This shows a need to consider writers' perception along with their written products simultaneously. Overall, this is a claim which points out the importance of writers' thoughts and perceptions in writing as deficiency from previous studies to explore the rhetorical structure of a written text as a genre a long with the writers' perceptions. To be clearer, although many studies have been conducted on genre analysis of EFL/ESL writers' written text to find out their difficulties, exploring their perceptions in this regard has been neglected. As literature shows, researchers have usually tried to explore faculty members' insights (Samraj, 2008; Kamyabigol and Rashid, 2014) besides analyzing written texts as the writers' productions. Samraj (2008) analyzed the master's theses using Swales' (1990) CARS model but she interviewed with subject specialists. By contrast, Kamyabigol and Rashid (2014) conducted a study to explore Iranian and Malaysian students' writing difficulties by interviewing both students and their teachers to perceive the most difficult area in English writing by numbering most problematic to least problematic without genre analysis. The claim of the current study is to consider writers' perceptions and their written texts together as the gap found in the literature.

In an attempt to address the gaps existing in prior research (lack of identifying the rhetorical structure of the PS linguistically and exploring writers' perceptions toward this sub-section of the introduction), this study seeks to identify the rhetorical structure of the PS which may reveal deficiencies in this area. To accomplish this aim, Swales' (1990) CARS model as the theoretical framework will be used. To use this model, the linguistic features have important role to identify the rhetorical structure including move and steps which will be the other aim of this study.

It is worth mentioning that as Samraj (2008) stated that although thesis writing is important for all postgraduate students in academic setting, MA theses have attracted less attention than PhD theses or dissertations. This was the main reason to choose samples from MA research projects and filling this gap of the literature. Also, interviewees are TEFL PhD students who are taking first or second semester of their program. The reason to choose the PhD students for interview was that they had submitted a research study for their master's degrees in addition to publication at least one paper that will be elaborated in chapter 3. Therefore, the PhD students were familiar with the PS section. Writing a thesis or research project means being familiar with writing the PS section. Hence, to address the problem, this study focuses on the rhetorical structure of the PS as an independent section of the Iranian EFL postgraduate research projects to identify moves and steps linguistically and exploring writers' perceptions about a well-structured PS. These three objectives are presented in the next section.

1.3 Objectives

The present study focused on the PSs written in English by MA candidates who graduated from Iranian universities. Moreover, in addition to analyzing the samples to define the moves and steps of the rhetorical structure of the PS sections written by these candidates, their perceptions were also explored. The objectives of this study are to:

1. find the moves and the steps written by Iranian EFL postgraduate TEFL students' research projects in the PS section;
2. determine the specific types of linguistic features associated with each move and step; and
3. explore Iranian EFL postgraduate students' perceptions about rhetorical structure of the problem statement.

1.4 Research Questions

This study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What is the rhetorical structure of the PS sections in TEFL Iranian students' MA research projects?
2. What are the linguistic features which signal each move and step in the PS sections of Iranian students' MA research projects in TEFL?
3. What perceptions do Iranian postgraduate students in TEFL have about rhetorical structures of PSs in MA research projects?

1.5 Theoretical Underpinning and Conceptual Framework

Swales' (1990) CARS model underlines this study. In Swales' point of view, 'genre' has a 'fuzzy concept' and "refers to a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations" (1990, p. 33). In this study, 'genre' has been theorized to define move and step in the process of analyzing the rhetorical structure of PSs written by Iranian postgraduate students using the CARS model. Swales (1990) has offered linguistic features as the signs and clues to distinguishing a move and steps. In this regard, to exemplify the schematic structure of the composition genre, a thesis is the best example, including position and preview, argumentative texts comprising a side of the point, which may be followed by restatement of a theory in that thesis (Kay & Dudley-Evans,1998). Furthermore, besides analyzing the whole or any part of a thesis to assess writers' knowledge, exploring the writers' knowledge and perceptions in this regard is also important. As Can (2009) (who explored the PhD students' perceptions and attitudes in academic writing) states, assessing students' content knowledge and writing skills is the main purposes of the academic writing in higher education and "Academic writing in doctoral education can be in the form of essays, manuscripts, articles, reports, journals, and so forth" (p. 6). Besides Swales'

CARS model, Pho's classifications of the linguistic features and Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis were used in this study.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the move analysis using Swales' (1990) CARS model with the aims of considering the PS rhetorical structure of the master (MA) students as an academic writing skill and the PhD students' perceptions about this part of the research project based on the deficiency of the research studies. Thus, defining moves and steps are along with the linguistic features as the signals.
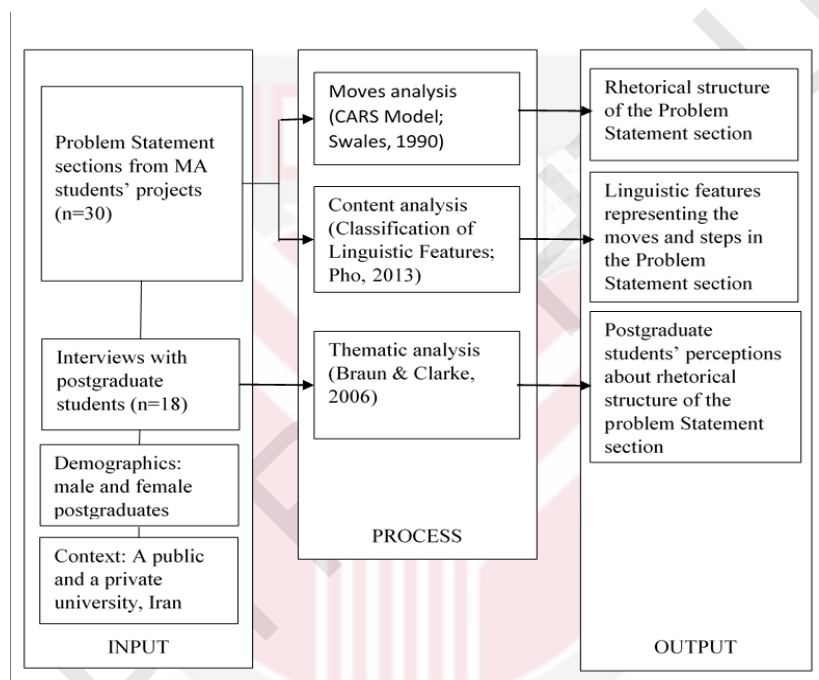
Figure 1.1 : Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1 shows, the conceptual framework of the study, which is structured with identifying the rhetorical structure of the PS. The conceptual framework identifies the main components in the process of accomplishment the aims of the study. As was previously introduced, this study aims to adapt the logic model framework proposed by Swales' (1990) CARS model which includes three moves and their related steps (Samraj, 2005).

In this study, the input is the PSs collected as the samples and the interview transcriptions. The PSs written by Iranian EFL postgraduate students were collected from two universities in Iran. The interview transcriptions as the next input were

provided from the same universities. Swales' (1990) CARS model is used to identify moves and steps along with Pho's classifications of the linguistic features. Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework including a six-phase will be used for thematic analysis which is deductive in nature. According to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), the thematic deductive analysis is driven by the specific research question(s) and/or the analyst's focus. In this regard, the researcher's focus is on a) move analysis using Swales' (1990) CARS model, b) content analysis using Pho's (2013) classification of linguistic features, and c) Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis. The process of the move and content analysis leads to identify rhetorical structure of the PSs written by the Iranian EFL postgraduate students in one hand and on the other hand the thematic analysis will represent the Iranian EFL postgraduate students' perceptions toward the rhetorical structure of the PS. Further discussion on the adopted model and analytical framework will be done in chapter two.

1.6   Significance of the Study

In addition, the writers' perceptions toward the rhetorical structure of a language has important role in their performances in creating a piece of writing. Connor (1996) points out that a writing pattern reflects writer's thinking pattern. The investigation of the rhetorical structure of various written parts of the research projects and theses is significant for both ESL/EFL learners and lecturers (Harklau, 2002 as cited in Samraj, 2005). In academic settings, mastering to convey various types of genre is an important writing skill. Accordingly, the EFL/ESL writers must be able to convey various parts of a thesis accurately. Among various parts of the thesis, the PS is an important sub-section. It should be written with a proper rhetorical structure. In order to emphasize the importance of the PS as a component of the research article (RA), proposal, and thesis or dissertation components, Stansbury (2002) states that:

> The components of a research article work together in manner similar to those of a long-span structure, such as a bridge. Critical to the strength and flexibility of the bridge is the use of some sort of truss. Such is the role of the problem statement in research writings, providing structural strength to the presentation of argument, method, and analysis. Analyzing characteristics of problem statements in the writings of library and information science (LIS) is one way in which the communication system of the discipline can be understood (p. 157).

To conclude from what has been mentioned about PS, it is essential to know the characteristics, rhetorical structure, and role of this part in thesis writing by using a well-established framework. Using an explicit rhetorical structure to convey a PS not only facilitates the process of writing this section but also provides a theoretical framework for lecturers and supervisors in teaching English writing. According to Metoyer-Duran and Hernon (1994), studies about writing the PS are useful and can increase researchers'

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knowledge and awareness about the role of PSs and may be an interesting area in cross-disciplinary suggestions and proposals.

1.7 Operational Definition of Key Terms

1.7.1 Genre/Genre Analysis

While a variety of definitions of the term genre have been suggested, this study will use the definition first suggested by Swales (1990) who saw it as a group of texts that come together as the communicative events to share a set of communicative purposes. Moreover, genre analysis is an approach to identify the rhetorical patterns in the introductions to research articles. Swales (1981, 1990) defined a 'move' as a section of text that serves a specific communicative function. Overall, the genre analysis approach defines the rhetorical structure of genre in the form of moves and steps. Genre refers to the PS section of research projects in this study and genre analysis is analyzing the rhetorical structure of the PSs.

1.7.2 Rhetorical Structure

This term refers to text organization and the relation between various parts of a text. Furthermore, it is related to Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST), which was initially proposed by William Mann and Sandra Thompson in 1988. The rhetorical structure used in the present study is based on Swales' definition of genre analysis and refers to the organization and content of a text as a genre.

1.7.3 Rhetorical Move/ Move

The term '*rhetorical move*' was initially proposed by John Swales (1981, 1990, and 2004) in relation to genre analysis. In Swales' (2004) point of view, moves as the discoursal or rhetorical units have a coherent communicative function in the text. Guinda, (2015) defines moves as "indicators of the regularities in situated activities across social, cultural, and institutional contexts" (p. 74). Pho (2013) points out that Swales' (1990) identification of moves is based on function and on certain linguistic signals (p. 13). As the theory underpinning this study is Swales' (1990) CARS model, the move refers to the unit with communicative purpose that its realization is based on a sentence.

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1.7.4   Problem Statement (PS)

The term problem statement (PS) refers to an academic problem regarding the existence of a gap in previous literature or in the real world of academic setting (Creswell, 2014). It is a subsection of the first chapter in a research proposal or thesis regarding its significant role in the thesis writing, is the central phenomenon and focus of conducting this study.

1.7.5   CARS Model

In this study, the acronym/abbreviation CARS will be used for *'Create-A-Research-Space'*. John Swales proposed this model of genre analysis in 1990. It has been used to verify a move structure and its sub-moves or steps in RAs introductions so far, but in this study, it will be applied just to define the moves and steps in the PS section. The CARS model proposes a move structure for research article introductions motivated by the rhetorical need to establish the significance of the current research for the discipline for which it was written. Each move is subdivided into steps which conventionally realize its underlying purpose (Hyland, 2002). Various linguists have explained the word 'move' differently. It is a text segment, which comprises linguistic features and syntax, which in turn give a uniform expression to that text segment. Bhatia (2008) defines moves as the "rhetorical instruments that realize a subset of specific communicative purposes associated with a genre" (p. 84). Upton and Connor (2001) view moves as "semantic/functional units of texts, which can be identified through their communicative purposes and their typical linguistic boundaries" (p. 317).

1.7.6   Linguistic Features

Linguistic features refer to phrase and words as the cues or signals to distinguish the move and steps in genre analysis according Swales' (1990) CARS model. To offer some examples from Swales (1990), a word such as *'in recent years, ...'* or *'a central issue in ...'* helps distinguish M1. Other examples would be words like '*shortcoming*', '*deficiencies*', *'limitation in existing work'*, and '*however*' that are often used to indicate the existing gap or niche in M2. Lastly, word like 'aim' 'purpose', and 'focus' signal M3 (Swales, 1990). Phong Dzung Pho has classified the linguistic features into 7 features. This illustration has been used in the present study.

1.8   Organization of the Study

This thesis has 5 chapters. The current chapter as the initial one has presented the PS, RQs, and a definition of key terms of the study. It is followed by chapter 2 (Literature Review) which sets out the theoretical framework, the conceptual framework, and a review of the related theories in the field of genre analysis and discourse community.

Chapter 3 provides the methodology of the study including research design, scope, sample size, participants, and instruments. In this chapter, the reason of applying the CARS model to the analysis of the PSs written by MA scholars and interviewing the PhD scholars will be clarified. The content and textual organization of the PS sections chosen from MA dissertation have been explored by drawing 3 moves and steps (Swales, 1990). In addition, chapter 3 draws upon 18 interviews carried out at 2 universities in Iran, to explore Iranian scholars' perceptions toward the textual organization of a PS.

Chapter 4 demonstrates the results and findings of the application of move analysis, focusing on the PS sections. The purpose is to explore the textual organization of MA scholars writing in English, and, then, to examine how PhD scholars acknowledge the rhetorical structure of the PS section as the members of the discourse community. At the end of this chapter, the discussion about results and findings of the study is provided.

Chapter 5 presents the answers of the research questions by drawing on move analysis model (Swales, 1990). Moreover, this chapter has recommendations and implications for further research.

1.9   Summary

This chapter as the first chapter provided an overview of what would be going to establish in this study. The background clarified the context and specified the subjects who have been defined as the EFL postgraduate students with problems in writing skill. The research objectives and exploring research questions were defined the aim of the study. Operational definitions were explained to clarify the concepts of using them throughout the study.

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