The dynamic rhetorical structures of TESOL conference abstracts

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Abstract

In English Language Teaching (ELT), conferences have developed into valuable venues for both researchers and practitioners to learn and share their knowledge bases. Attending and presenting at academic conferences has become an important form of scholarship and professional development for researchers, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers. In the field of ELT, the TESOL International Convention and Language Expo is a highly prestigious event but, for those wanting to present, highly competitive. The conference abstract is the basis of being granted permission to present at such conferences and, as such, is a critical gate-keeping genre. The goal of the present empirical study is to examine rhetorical features of successful conference abstracts (N=16) with the hope that the results will help teachers write their own conference proposals. Using genre analysis (Swales, 1990), the rhetorical structures of conference abstracts for TESOL 2014 were collected and annotated for rhetorical moves and steps following Halleck and Connor (2006). This detailed analysis uncovered rhetorical patterns common to all conference abstracts. Despite this, variations within proposals were identified in terms of number of moves and specific sequencing. Guidance and tips for novice writers are presented, and connections are made to local TESOL affiliates, such as BC TEAL.

Introduction

Academic conferences offer important opportunities for current and future language professionals to learn from experts in the field and to share novel research. As such, the conference abstract (CA), which is used to grant permission to present at such conferences, is a critical gate-keeping genre. Despite recent efforts to unpack the stylistic and rhetorical features of successful CAs (see, e.g., Egbert & Plonsky, 2015; Swales & Feak, 2009), for many novice writers this genre remains enigmatic. Consequently, presenting original research at reputable academic conferences may remain inaccessible. With the goal of helping novice researchers and teachers write their own conference proposals, this study explores the genre of successful CAs previously accepted for the TESOL International Convention and Language Expo. The findings may benefit not only novice and experienced teachers interested in joining the discourse community, but also graduate students of TESOL who seek to learn about CAs.

Literature Review

Conferences: Professional development opportunities

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), conferences have developed into valuable venues for both researchers and practitioners. Attending and presenting at academic conferences

has become an important form of scholarship and professional development that can lead to employment, promotion, and tenure (Halleck & Connor, 2006). Within the TESOL organization, there are more than 100 independent affiliates worldwide (TESOL, 2016a), and many host their own conferences for language educators. In British Columbia, for instance, the Association of British Columbia Teachers of English as an Additional Language (BC TEAL) hosts an annual conference, as well as smaller regional conferences, that provide spaces for educators to converse and research various dimensions of the profession. These venues also offer valuable experiences for local and regional communities in TESOL to address issues in teaching and policy. In addition to these affiliate conferences, TESOL hosts an annual conference for its worldwide membership, the TESOL International Convention and Language Expo (henceforth the TESOL Convention), which attracts more than 6,500 language professionals each year (TESOL, 2016b). This convention offers teachers, researchers, and administrators opportunities to interact and make important connections with each other and to expand the pedagogical and theoretical knowledge bases of the field.

Training and professional development opportunities are critical for English language pre-service teachers, in particular graduate students of TESOL. This relevance is reflected in TESOL's standards for certificate programs and professional development of teacher-learners. These standards, which cover three areas of professional development (i.e., organization and program management, curriculum and instruction, and candidate standards), highlight the need for TESOL candidates to provide evidence of professional learning and growth through engaged participation at conferences (TESOL, 2016c). Professional development is not reserved for teacher-learners, however. Instead, in-service instructors must also make a concerted effort to stay up-to-date with developments in language theories and pedagogical practices and be open to revisiting their own practices. One way to keep abreast of such changes is to regularly read published research articles. Unfortunately, matters of time and interest may prevent practitioners from actively searching for written research. Conference attendance, on the other hand, offers comparable benefits and may provide even more direct connection to an attendee's regular teaching practices.

Simply attending a conference, however, may continue to place in-service teachers in a more peripheral role in the professionalization of the field. Teachers, we believe, should be supported in presenting their own research-based practices derived from classroom experiences, thus adding to the overall knowledge of the field and legitimizing their work. In addition to these honest and virtuous reasons, there are also practical reasons for justifying active participation. Within academia, costs associated with conferences are often covered only when a proposal is accepted (Halleck & Connor, 2006; Kaplan, Cantor, Hagstrom, Kamhi-Stein, Shiotani, & Zimmerman, 1994). Moreover, giving a paper at an internationally recognized conference increases the educator's professional status, and he or she becomes a fuller legitimate participant in that given community as a result (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Kaplan, et al., 1994).

Having described the importance of presenting in academic conferences, we must also recognize that those who would benefit most may be unfamiliar with how to enter into this discourse community. In fact, the reality is that relatively few are granted the opportunity to present at the TESOL Convention. In 2013, for instance, the acceptance rate was only 26% (L. Dyson, personal communication, October 3, 2012). Given this standard for acceptance,

conducting an impressive and new study might not be enough. In fact, the most important gate-keeping step of the presentation process is the writing of a CA. The CAs are not public documents; rather, they are detailed summaries of the proposed research made available only to conference reviewers. Thus, knowledge of this genre can be seen as an important form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and/or power (Faber, 1996). Cultural capital includes types of knowledge, education, and skills that increase an individual's status in his or her social environments (Bourdieu, 1986). These forms of capital, which are acquired through a process of acculturation, are often limited to a small group of academics. As teacher educators and supporters of practitioner-led research, we strongly believe that the dissemination of ideas should not be conducted primarily by research faculty. Rather, all pre-service and in-service teachers should be able to participate in the discourse community and, as a requirement, become competent writers of this occluded genre. For this to happen, accessing proposals and studying their rhetorical moves is of primary importance.

Our review of the literature and our own experiences suggest that in-service teachers or those aspiring to enter this realm of academia may not receive sufficient guidance on how to write CAs. For these reasons, this study examined CA proposals for the TESOL Convention, uncovering the core rhetorical features and offering novice applicants explicit explanations of this genre. It is our hope to help increase these applicants' likelihood of being accepted. Before describing our data collection and analysis, findings, and suggestions for future writers, we provide a review of research that has been conducted on CAs in the fields of applied linguistics and TESOL.

Genre Analysis and Conference Proposals

In the field of writing for professional academic purposes, a surge of research has emerged, evidenced by the number of book-long publications on writing for academic and specific purposes (Candlin, Crompton, & Hatim, 2015; Hyland, 2013; Swales, 2004; Swales & Feak, 2009, 2012), as well as the publication of reputable journals (e.g., *English for Specific Purposes* and *The Journal of English for Academic Purposes*). Today, the use of genre-based approaches to inform writing courses is a common practice and is associated with several benefits. Hyland (2013), for example, maintains that genre-based instruction provides explicit and systematic guidance and serves to raise an awareness of various academic genres.

One genre, the research article, has been widely studied. Swales (1990), who closely examined research article introductions, began a large area of research on this section, or subgenre. To that end, Swales proposed the Create a Research Space (CARS) model for writing research introduction articles. He found that introductions tended to follow three rather stable rhetorical moves: (1) Establishing a territory, (2) Establishing a niche, and (3) Occupying the niche. This motivated significant amounts of research across disciplines and languages (e.g., Hirano, 2009; Loi, 2010; Ozturk, 2007; Samraj, 2002; Sheldon, 2012). Although many variations on the CARS model have been used (adding moves or steps towards those moves), the central theme has remained the same: when initially presenting academic work (e.g., an abstract or an introduction), writers often describe what has been done before, what has not yet been done, and how the subsequent research will fill that gap.

Genre-based research has continued to branch out, moving towards the systematic study of other genres, especially occluded genres such as the CA. An occluded genre is one that is typically confidential and often not accessible to public viewing (Swales, 1996, 2004). Analyses of occluded genres are of particular use because novice members of a discourse community lack both receptive and productive experience with occluded genres and "understanding the genres of written communication in one's field is… essential to professional success" (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, p. 1). If such a novice wanted to write a CA, for example, she/he may want to access examples of successful proposals from which to model. However, samples of conference proposals are often not readily available since the TESOL conference programs and many other conferences only publish short 50-word descriptions to guide attendees in their selection of sessions to attend. In other words, CAs are difficult documents for newer members of this discourse community to access.

Perhaps because of the lack of available models, or maybe because there is a desire to keep the genre occluded, novice writers do not often receive explicit instruction on how to write conference proposals. To date there have been a few publications that have explored the genre of CAs for conferences from the field of Applied Linguistics: American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) (Kaplan, et al., 1994); Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Faber, 1996); TESOL (Halleck & Connor, 2006); The British Association for Applied Linguistics; Sociolinguistics Symposium (Cutting, 2012); and Second Language Research Forum (SLRF) (Egbert & Plonsky, 2015).

Kaplan, et al. (1994) examined the genre of conference proposals submitted to AAAL. In total, 294 abstracts were analyzed for discourse moves. Specifically, their analysis considered the CAs' thematic structure, clause structure, pragmatic moves, propositional organization, and lexical cohesion. They found that only half of the proposals included the sequence of introduction, methods, results, and conclusions. Interestingly, the methodology section was omitted more frequently than the other sections. Drawing on moves for research introductions (Swales, 1990) to analyze CAs, they identified four key moves in successful proposals: (1) establish the field (79%), (2) summarize previous studies (39%), (3) prepare for present study by showing a gap (24%), and (4) introduce the present study (97%). The methodology was present in 64% of these CAs and the results in 76%. This seminal study motivated subsequent investigations of the CAs of other large conferences.

Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) considered abstracts submitted to the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Following their pilot study (1988) they collected a corpus of 441 proposals submitted over a three-year span, namely 1989, 1990, and 1992. They found that excellent proposals typically considered current topics, included a clearly defined problem, illustrated insider knowledge, and "projected insider ethos" (p. 102). In addition, they identified a predictable sequence: Problem→ Method→ Findings→ Conclusions. They found that the Problem could comprise as much as one third to two thirds of the CAs. Interestingly, the authors reported that numerous abstracts "barely even mentioned method and findings/conclusions" (p. 107). This contrasts with those submitted to AAAL in terms of reporting results. Drawing on the same corpus, Faber (1996) further compared the features of high-rated and low-rated conference abstracts. Faber identified five components: (1) problem statement, (2) methods section, (3) clearly articulated product, (4) presentation objectives, and

(5) a citation section. Findings indicated two features for the high-rated conference proposals: problem statement and objective statement. Again, it appears as though methodology, overall, was not as salient as the other rhetorical moves. Of interest, citation trends were comparable across the higher- and lower-rated abstracts in 1992 and tended to be included in approximately half of the proposals. Cutting (2012) examined proposals submitted to the British Association for Applied Linguistics conference and to the Sociolinguistic Symposium. While mostly concerned with the status of the research (in terms of completeness) at the time of the submission, what has been referred to as *promissory research* (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, p. 107), they also identified important patterns in rhetorical moves. They found that this set of CAs consisted primarily of two core sections: introduction and methodology. Conversely, it appeared as though results and discussions were, once more, considered less critical for successful proposals.

While a move that describes a study's results has not been found to be common in previous studies of CAs, recent work suggests otherwise. Egbert and Plonsky (2015) studied the linguistic and stylistic features of 287 accepted and rejected conference abstracts submitted to the 2009 SLRF conference. They found that all abstracts contained an introduction, and that those with a methodology and results section scored significantly higher than those without. Discussions, however, appeared to be omitted most often, confirming patterns observed by Cutting (2012). Finally, Egbert and Plonsky's analysis of linguistic variables led to the identification of six variables that were considered significant predictors of success, namely (1) number of words, (2) citations, (3) results section, (4) nouns, (5) lack of errors, and (6) first-person pronouns.

TESOL is the largest professional development opportunity for ELT worldwide. To the best of our knowledge, Halleck and Connor (2006) are the only researchers to have examined the structure of proposals submitted in 1996 to the TESOL International Convention. This large-scale study considered a total of 1,911 proposals which were sorted by interest section and type of paper (e.g., paper, demonstration, workshop, or colloquium). They found several key moves, including Territory, Reporting Previous Research, Gap, Goal, Means 1, Means 2, Outcomes, Benefits, Importance, and Competence Claim. Given their focus on CAs submitted to the TESOL Convention, the present study adopted their coding scheme, which is clearly operationalized in Table 1. Despite being published only recently (in 2006), the corpus is approximately 20 years old. Thus, adopting their framework to take a close look at TESOL CAs is worthwhile.

Together, these studies suggest that conference proposals are genres marked by systematic features; however, these features are susceptible to variations in response to the audiences' expectations and needs, as evidenced by the findings from conference proposals submitted to various venues. TESOL, being the largest organization for ELT, boasts an excellent reputation. TESOL also organizes the largest professional development event for English language educators, the TESOL Convention. TESOL does provide suggestions about their expectations for proposals and how those proposals will be evaluated (published annually along with the call for proposals). For example, the call for proposals specifies the word limits (N=300), a list of talking points a session description should cover, and the rubric that will be used to rate the proposals. The practice of making evaluation criteria public has also been adopted by many local affiliates, including BC TEAL. Unfortunately, these suggestions are used

universally for all types of presentations at the conference: colloquia, discussion groups, roundtable discussions, poster sessions, practice-oriented presentations, research-oriented presentations, teaching tips, and workshops. Thus, a language teacher who has experience with pedagogically focused presentations may find it difficult to enter into the realm of research-oriented presentations. Given the desire and, in some contexts, the pressure for teachers to contribute to the dissemination of ideas for promotion and funding, it is important for future and current teachers to present empirical research at conferences like the TESOL Convention.

Table 1

Operationalization of categories for conference proposal analysis

Category	Operationalization
Territory	Establishes physical and/or situational context of the activity
Reporting previous research (RPR)	Makes references to previous work, situating the current activity
Gap	In relation to theoretical or empirical territory, shows a lack of knowledge in the field; serves to motivate the study
Goal	States the aim and/or objective of the activity
Means 1	Specifies the methodology, procedures, plans of action, and tasks of the project
Means 2	Specifies the presentation's method and procedure—what is to be accomplished in a specified amount of time
Outcomes	Presents findings or achievements resulting from the study
Benefits	Explains and connects outcomes (intended/projected) to real world applications
Importance claim	States the urgent need for the proposed activity
Competence claim	States the proposer's credibility

Although Halleck and Connor (2006) attempted to demystify the process of preparing an abstract for TESOL's flagship event, their corpus included information from 1996. Genres are dynamic rhetorical structures, and it is important to examine them in various socio-temporal contexts. In addition, the majority of studies have identified rhetorical moves but have not considered how these moves are organized within a given proposal. With increased attention to genre and rhetorical moves, the present study examines whether similar patterns are common today in TESOL Convention proposals and further examines the sequencing of such moves for research-oriented proposals, namely their internal structure and organization. This was accomplished by considering a corpus of CAs (N=16) that were accepted and presented at the 2014 TESOL Convention in Portland, OR.

With these studies in mind, we formulated three research questions and their respective hypotheses:

RQ 1:   To what extent do research-based CAs at the TESOL International Convention abide by general requirements stipulated by TESOL specifications?

Hypothesis: Given the space limits imposed by the submission site, authors will be very close to the 300-word proposal limit and the 10-word title limit.

RQ 2:   What rhetorical moves are present in those proposals?

Hypothesis: Given the broad and general session description specifications and the conference proposal as an occluded genre, variation of the rhetorical moves is going to be salient. However, keeping in mind that the proposals are research-oriented, authors will have to discuss their research focus in relation to a perceived gap and explain their research design and findings.

RQ 3:   How are those rhetorical moves organized within given proposals?

Hypothesis: Building on previous knowledge of similar genres and established models (i.e., CARS, IMRD), the conference proposal should follow a relatively stable pattern.

Methodology

The goal of this small-scale, exploratory study was to identify the structural features, rhetorical moves, and internal organization of research-based CA proposals submitted to the TESOL International Convention and Language Expo. To obtain a corpus, we turned to the 2014 program book after the event. In total, 206 research-oriented proposals were included in the 2014 program book. Via email, we contacted the authors of those presentations who had published their email addresses and asked the main authors if they were willing to share their proposals for textual analysis. From that pool, we received 16 research-oriented proposals, representing 7.8% of all research-based proposals. Despite the relatively small sample size, the positive responses would enable a close examination of the structural features and rhetorical moves of research-oriented proposals, and more importantly, their internal organization from authors spanning unique teaching and learning contexts.

The major focus of our study relies on move analysis, an often-used method in the analysis of conference abstracts (e.g., Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Halleck & Connor, 2006; Swales & Feak, 2009). For this study, we chose to start with the coding scheme proposed by Halleck and Connor (2006) because it also investigated proposals to the TESOL International Convention. Using that scheme, each sentence in the session descriptions was assigned one of the ten moves (see Table 1). After deliberating on the ten categories, each rater independently coded the 16 proposals. Following, Rater 1 and Rater 2 met and an inter-coder reliability of 93% was obtained. The discrepancies were discussed and led to an agreement rate of 100%. The next section presents the findings of the analysis.

Findings

The overarching goal of the present study was to examine CAs from a specific research forum to help demystify an occluded genre for members in the profession. Our analysis examined the rhetorical structures of research-based conference proposals submitted to TESOL 2014. Research question 1 focused on identifying the total number of words for each proposal as a way to determine whether successful proposals abided to the general requirements provided in the call. In this sample, the average number of words was 286.6 (SD = 16.9), only 13.4 words below the stipulated 300-word limit. This implies that writers take advantage of the space to provide

accurate details of the study. With respect to the titles, the average number of words was 9.3 (SD = 1.03) (max: 10 words).

To answer the second research question, we examined the existence and number of particular rhetorical moves of the proposals using the coding scheme from Halleck and Connor (2006) (see Table 1 for categories). For this, we were concerned with moves rather than sentences; therefore, it was possible for proposals to combine multiple moves within a single sentence. Our findings showed that the average number of moves per proposal was 10.2. The majority of the rhetorical moves fell under three types: in decreasing order of frequency, Means 1 was the most frequent (n= 28; 17.2%), followed by Establishing Territory (n=26; 16.0%), and finally Outcomes (n=24=14.7%) (see Figure 1). In addition, a high percentage of the CAs included the following moves: Gaps (n=19; 11.7%) and Goals (n=19; 11.7%).
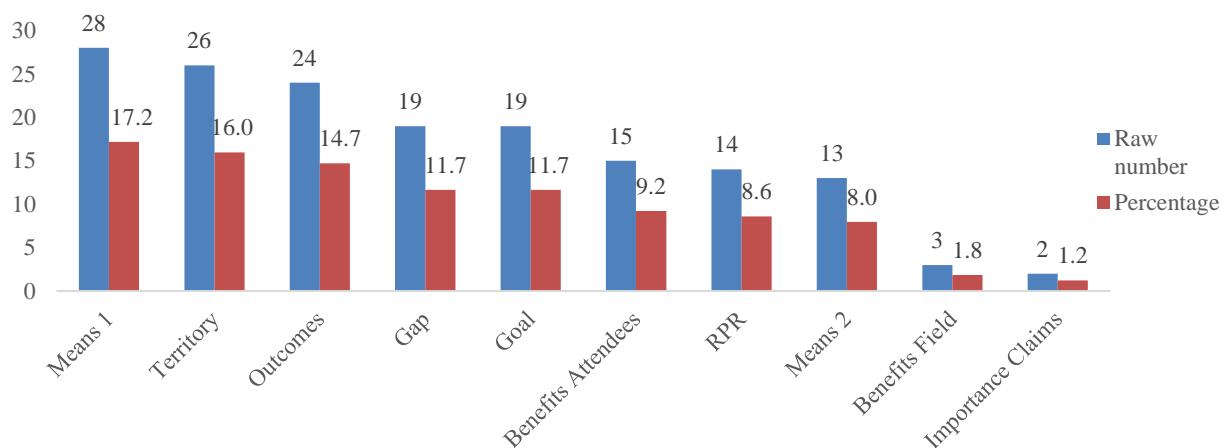

Figure 1. Distribution of rhetorical moves

As illustrated in Figure 1, it also appears to be common for authors to include the Benefits to Attendees (n=15; 9.2%), Reporting on Previous Research (RPR) (n=14; 8.6%), and Means 2 (i.e., discussing details of the presentation format) (n=13; 8.2%). The category Benefits to Attendees had not been identified in Halleck and Connor (2006). We operationalized this move as statements that explicitly explained how the research findings would benefit those who attended the session (see examples A and B for sample language).

Example A. Suggestions for how to interpret students' journal entries as source of knowledge will be discussed, as well as recommendations for working within pre-service teachers' ZPDs.
Example B. We will offer strategies we have used to improve literacy skills and promote a culture of reading among learners and allow time for others to share their own barriers and breakthroughs.

The two least important identified moves included Benefits to the Field (n=3; 1.7%) or Importance Claim (n=2; 1.2%). Finally, in this data set, Competence Claim was never identified. Thus, with the exception of these last three categories, it becomes clear that a majority of CAs

include a range of categories evidenced by the similar distributions across several categories (i.e., range between 17.2% and 8%).

In drafting a CA proposal, it is not uncommon for authors to exclude a given move. Thus, in addition to the global picture of the moves, we examined which of the moves were included in each proposal. This type of analysis provides some indication of the most valued rhetorical moves for CAs. To calculate these percentages, we divided the total number of writers who used a given category at least once by the total number of proposals, namely 16. As illustrated by Figure 2, no single move was used by all 16 participants. Nevertheless, two moves were present in the majority of the proposals: Gap was used by 87.5% of the writers (n=14), and Means 1 was used by 81.3% of the writers (n=13). This is evidence that it is beneficial to show the value of your work in terms of advances in our field and to clearly describe the research procedures that were followed. The third most important move was Establishing Territory, which was used by 75% of the writers (n=12). Interestingly, the analysis also revealed that Outcomes was not a move common to all writers. Only nine participants (56%) included a discussion of the Outcomes, which could be a result of submitting proposals before having completed the research. Finally, Benefits to the Field and the Importance Claim were discussed by only two writers (12.5%).
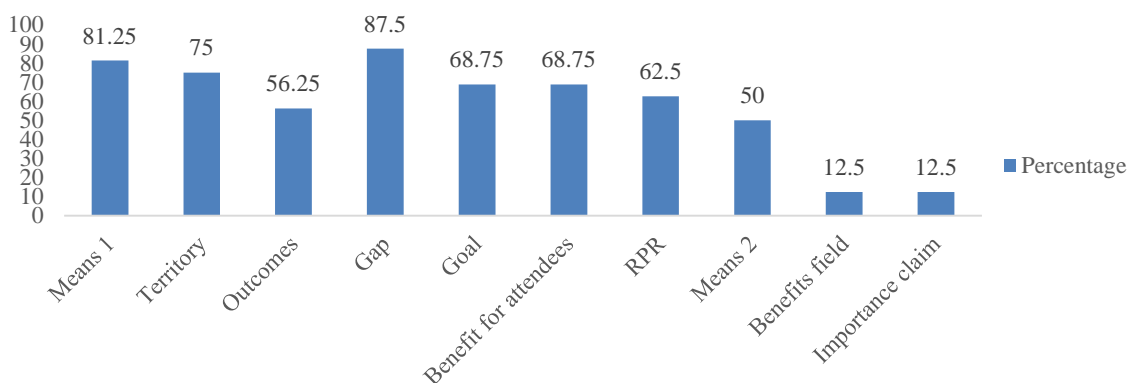

Figure 2. Percentage of moves used by each individual writer

Finally, to further uncover the prominence of these moves in the proposals, we compared the raw number of moves (Figure 1) and compared these to the individual writers' practices (Figure 2). Recall that Means 1, Territory, and Outcomes were the most frequent in terms of raw numbers, as illustrated in Figure 1. In this data set, 28 moves were coded as Means 1 and, interestingly, 13 of the 16 writers included this move whereby they explained the process that guided their research. Thus, there appears to be some implicit agreement for authors to include this information and dedicate a rather large portion of the abstract to describing the approach and methods that informed the research. The high frequency of Establishing Territory also appeared to be consistent with the individual writer's practices: 26 moves distributed across 12 writers.

Some diverging patterns were observed. We found that the inclusion of Outcomes is irregular in this data set such that only nine writers, or 56.3%, talked about the study's results. This low percentage for Outcomes stands in stark contrast with the raw count of this rhetorical move, namely n=24. It appears as though fewer writers give specific information about the

findings, which could be a result of submitting promissory abstracts (Swales & Feak, 2009). In other words, when authors have yet to complete the research, they avoid this and focus instead on Benefits to the Attendees. However, when the research is complete, clear results are shared. Another inconsistency lies in the Gap: while the rhetorical move Gap was utilized by 14 writers, the total raw number of this move was a mere 19. In other words, successful writers understand the value of addressing the empirical gap in their proposal and appear to be able to address this concisely. In terms of the least common moves, we found that Benefits to the Field and Importance Claim were not used often and were limited to two writers. As mentioned previously, the Competence Claim was not identified in this data set. This analysis confirms that there are more and less important features for individuals to consider when crafting their CAs.

The third research question examined the internal organization of the CAs' rhetorical moves. The analysis focused on the beginning three and concluding three moves of each CA proposal. This microanalysis was viable given the smaller sample size. Importantly, all tokens, rather than move type, were taken into account (i.e., if Proposal #1 followed a 1-1-2-3-4-4 sequence, the first three moves were thus 1-1-2).

One prominent pattern was identified for the opening statement: Move #1. Only three possible Move #1s surfaced: (1) Establishing Territory, (2) Reporting Previous Research, and (3) Gap. The most frequently used initial move was Territory (n=11), which was followed by Reporting Previous Research (n=4). Only one participant started the proposal with Gap (See Figure 3). With Move #2, similar moves were also included; however, greater variation was identified. For example, in addition to Establishing Territory (n=5), Reporting Previous Research (n=2), and Gap (n=7), some proposals included the Goal (n=2). Of the five CAs with Establishing Territory as their Move #2, four of these had already used this move for Move #1 and followed this, in Move #3, with Gap (n=3), Establishing Territory (n=1), or Reporting Previous Research (n=2). In sum, from the analysis of Move #1 and Move #2, the most important rhetorical moves are Establishing Territory, Reporting Previous Research, Gap, and Goal. As for Move #3, only three writers included Means 2 and one included Means 1. Quickly, we start to notice variation in how the introduction of this genre can be organized.
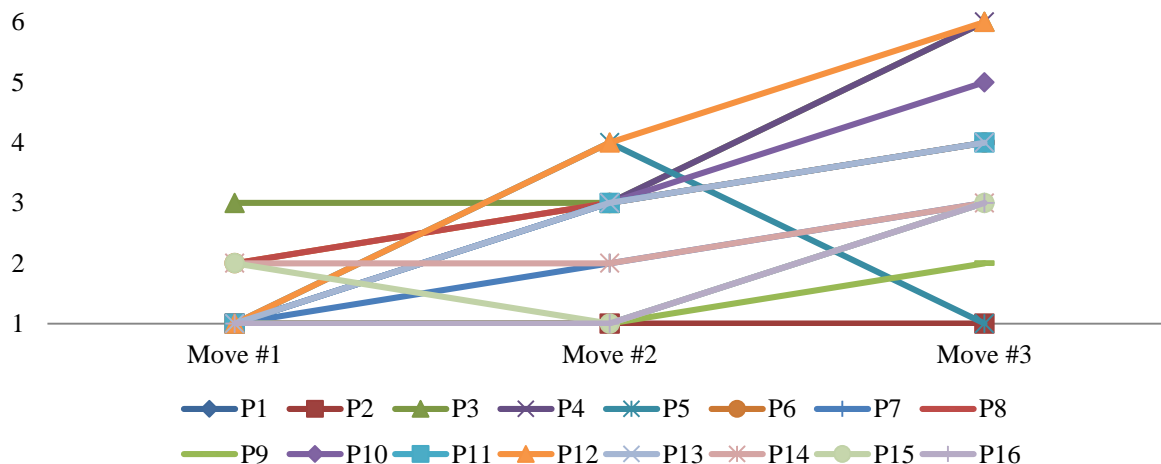

Figure 3. Internal organization of openings of conference proposals. In the vertical axis, the numbers indicate the following: 1=Territory; 2=RPR; 3=Gap; 4=Goal; 5=Means 1; 6=Means 2

In addition to examining the initial sequence, the analysis considered how the writers concluded their proposals. For this, the final three moves were taken into account (see Figure 4). Overall, the antepenultimate was dominated by Outcomes (n=7) and, to a lesser extent, Means 1 (n=4). While variation was identified, more predictability arose with the two final moves. The penultimate moves included Outcomes (n=8) and Benefits to the Attendees (n=8), whereas the final move was identified as Benefits to the Attendees (n=9) and followed by Means 2 (n=3) or Outcomes (n=3).
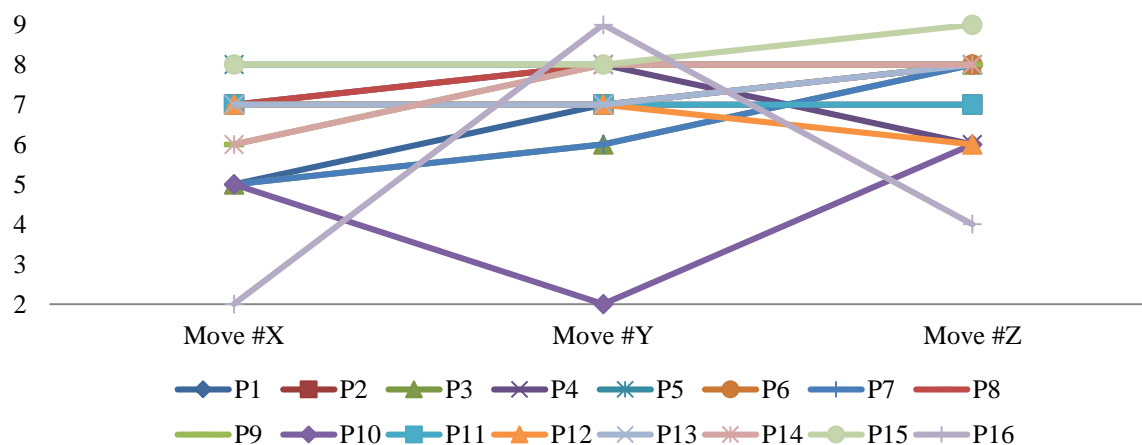

Figure 4. Internal organization of final components of CAs. In the vertical axis, the numbers indicate the following: 1= Territory; 2=RPR; 3=Gap; 4=Goal; 5= Means 1; 6=Means 2; 7=Outcomes; 8= Benefits; 9=Importance claim

In sum, when drafting a CA proposal, the opening and ending appear to follow rather predictable moves. Once the author has established the territory and/or discussed the gap, they conclude with a consideration of what their studies have to offer in terms of the outcomes and how attending the session, despite its having a focus on research, will benefit the audience members and their pedagogy.

Discussion

In academia, there are numerous genres that writers need to master to become legitimate participants in their respective fields. However, many genres are occluded and thus, for novice writers, remain enigmatic. In the field of second language (L2) writing, awareness of this is growing and, increasingly, publications are emerging that serve to guide and mentor novice writers (Candlin, Crompton, & Hatim, 2015; Hyland, 2013; Swales, 2004; Swales & Feak, 2009, 2012). In ELT, we see the practice of sharing one's experiences as a valuable part of professional development. We also believe that many research-based conference presentations are given by graduate faculty, often long-removed from the language classroom. Knowledge about teaching needs to include the voices of practitioners who focus on language teaching on a daily basis. The goal of the present study was to examine the genre of CAs to ensure that a greater number of novice or experienced teachers contribute to the knowledge base and to encourage pre-service teachers to think about what linguistic tools they need to enter the realm of conferences. Overall, we found evidence that successful CAs include, rather frequently, the following moves: Means 1, Establishing Territory, and Outcomes. Further, CAs tend to open with specific moves, namely,

Establishing Territory, Reporting Previous Research, and Gap, and conclude with a discussion of the Outcomes and Benefits to the Attendees. In the proceeding section, we review these findings in light of previous research and offer clear recommendations for writing a research-based CA proposal for TESOL.

With our first question, we sought to uncover the structural features that make up the CA. For this, we examined the average number of words. With the word limit of 300 for TESOL CAs, we found that successful proposals closely align to the recommended length, a finding that mirrors previous studies (Egbert & Plonsky, 2015; Halleck & Connor, 2006). This suggests that novice writers should utilize the recommended lengths in order to clearly explain their research and the contents of the actual presentation. As suggested by Swales and Feak (2009), this genre is promotional and serves to "sell your work" (p. 43). With the lengthier (yet organized and error-free) proposals, reviewers are better positioned to understand the research and its potential contribution. Halleck and Conner (2006), the only study referring to the TESOL Convention, identified that successful proposals were longer than rejected proposals, with mean numbers of 230.8 words and 202.5 words, respectively[1]. Egbert and Plonsky (2015) also identified a positive relationship between the length of the method and results section. These findings echo findings from L2 writing research. Specifically, in numerous L2 writing studies, one feature often associated with higher scores is in fact length of compositions (Jarvis, Grant, Bikowski, & Ferris, 2003; Grant & Ginther, 2000). Thus, in drafting research-based CAs for TESOL, it is recommended to utilize the allotted space.

The second goal was to examine whether the dominant moves proposed by Halleck and Connor (2006) would continue to make up the conference proposal abstract for the TESOL Convention, written nearly 20 years ago. In this sample of accepted CAs, we identified three frequent moves: Means 1, Territory, and Outcomes. These moves accounted for approximately 50% of the proposals' contents. However, when looking at the individual writers and their choices of rhetorical moves, we found that the more frequent moves to comprise conference proposals were Gap followed by Means 1 and Establishing Territory. The Outcomes were discussed by approximately half of the participants. These findings provide partial support for Halleck and Connor (2006), who found that Means 1 was very salient in their data set (89%). The next most common moves identified in their research were Goal (78%) and Means 2 (66%). Importantly, Gap was only included in 55% of the proposals (compared to 88% in the present data set). This discrepancy in Gap could be symptomatic of changes in and growth of ELT as a field. By identifying a gap, authors are informing the reviewers that they can communicate their ethos and "project more of an insider persona" of this well-established field through their knowledge of this genre (Berkenkotter, & Huckin, 1995, p. 111).

These findings have clear implications for novice writers. First, there is a need and expectation for writers to be presenting Means 1 within the allotted space. When writing a research proposal for TESOL, it appears to be of utmost importance to clearly discuss the research design that guided the study, as this reflects the writer's ability to clearly convey the novelty of their work and their knowledge of key research techniques. Therefore, after reading the proposal, the evaluator should quickly be able to answer the question "How did you examine your topic?" When interpreting the TESOL rubrics, when it reads that a proposal will refer

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[1] At the time of their study, guidelines indicated a one-page limit.

"specifically to the appropriate theory, practice, and/or research on which the presentation is based in a detailed, thorough, and comprehensible manner" (TESOL, 2015), writers must be very explicit and dedicate a significant amount of space to this information. It follows that Means 1 should present the setting, the data collection process, and instruments used to conduct the study.

The second important move identified in this study is the establishment of territory. Establishing Territory allows writers to demonstrate their knowledge of the theoretical domains and shows their legitimacy as writers and scholars to the CA reviewers. Through the inclusion of this move, reviewers may gain trust in the writer's credentials. Compared to Halleck and Connor (2006) and their 1996 corpus, it appears as though this feature has grown in importance over time. A possible explanation is that the field of ELT has expanded considerably and, to be taken seriously by the discourse community, writers need to show how their study fits into the larger context. Thus, as a writer, one should be able to answer the question "How does this study fit within the larger empirical context?" Therefore, if the situation or territory of the activity is well presented, it is much easier to determine whether this research is novel and of relevance to the audience, a dimension that can be evaluated in terms of criteria number 1 in the TESOL rubric: currency, importance, and appropriateness of a topic to the field.

With respect to the move Outcomes, the findings of this research are interesting. On the one hand, the raw frequency of this move was very high; however, only half of the participants actually included this move in their proposal. One possible explanation is that proposals for TESOL are often written before the studies are completely finished, and some writers may not be in a position to discuss the findings. Rather, in the ones that did not include a discussion of the outcomes, the writers tended to include a discussion of the benefits for the attendees. This finding appears to support the idea that many conference proposals are written before the study is actually completed, as identified in Cutting (2012) and Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995). Therefore, it may not be as important to discuss the findings; rather, writers may increase the strength of their proposal by focusing on projected outcomes in terms of attendee benefits.

Finally, the gap was not frequent in raw numbers. However, we do see that the gap was discussed by nearly all the participants. This finding shows the importance of highlighting what the study is contributing. One of the categories on the TESOL rubrics is titled "currency, importance, and appropriateness of topic to the field." When a gap in the field is identified, it becomes easier to convince the audience that the topic is "cutting-edge, immediately relevant, ground- breaking, or significant to the field" (TESOL, 2016). Thus, while it may not be necessary to spend much time on this dimension, it appears as though it is valued.

The third contribution of this study lies in the analysis of the internal patterns of CAs. Despite uncovering some variance, there are rather stable initial and final moves. Earlier studies suggested that CAs would follow a pattern of Introduction→ Method→ Results→ Discussion/Conclusion. This micro-analysis highlighted the internal components of these introductions (i.e., Territory, Report Previous Research, Gap) and uncovered what concluding moves are critical for a practitioner-oriented audience, namely Outcomes and Benefits for the Attendees. It is this last category that we feel may help authors "sell" their work, since teachers will see the connections between theory and practice.

Before turning to explicit tips for new proposal writers, the limitations of the study should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. The current paper reports a small-scale research project, and our intention was not to make any generalization of these results to other conferences. Building on the current study, future research is warranted to examine a larger number of abstracts and could be expanded to include interviews with the authors in order to understand their processes while drafting CAs.

Guidance for Proposal Writers

The current study provides some valuable insights and serves to guide novice writers in the process of writing a research-oriented CA.

Identifying a gap and research topic

Before engaging in the process of writing your CA proposal, it is important that you identify a topic that is relevant and current to practitioners in varied contexts. To start imagining what is worthy of future research, we suggest that you peruse the conference program from the last two to three years and search for topics that are starting to emerge and/or topics that continue to draw attention. To identify topics particularly important to your geographical area, also consider the local affiliates' program book from a previous year (e.g., BC TEAL). Once you have identified a research topic and decided to do the research, immediately start thinking about presenting at TESOL. With the research underway, look at the theme for TESOL and let this theme guide you in drafting an original title that will catch the readers' attention and interest.

Realistic goals

In your proposal, you want to identify the gap that your research fills and discuss the means. When introducing the Means 1, be realistic and clear. One useful way to conceptualize this is to follow the categories included in the methodology section of an empirical study (i.e., participants, settings, instruments, procedure, coding). In addition, be sure that you can cover what you set out to do within the time allocation (typically 45-minute sessions). Also, show relevance of your research to other contexts. For instance, although you might be teaching English in British Columbia, explain how your research could benefit an English teacher working in Japan. You can do this by stating what the audience will get from attending your talk (i.e., Benefits to the Attendees).

The language

Your proposal should be 300 words and should include a variety of moves. Also, many writers fail to write clearly and concisely. The proposal readers are reading many proposals and if they have to guess what you are going to do, they will lose interest. Use clear constructions to present each of the moves.

The internal organization

The small corpus uncovered variation in the organization of the various CAs. However, some critical moves appear to be expected in a relatively stable order. Drawing on the present study's findings, CAs should include the following moves early on: Establishing Territory, Reporting Previous Research, Gap, and, optionally, Goal. This is illustrated in the Sample Proposal 1.

Sample Proposal 1.: Initial rhetorical moves

> Despite the fact that international undergraduate students have been the most studied population in the field of Second Language Writing […] (Territory), our knowledge of […] is still limited (Gap). In addition, surprisingly little is known about […] (Gap).

The writers may consider ending their CA with a consideration of the outcomes (or anticipated outcomes), and importantly, the benefits for the practitioners and researchers who will be in attendance (see Samples 2 and 3).

Sample Proposal 2.: Concluding rhetorical moves
> The presentation will highlight findings that cast light on differences regarding […] (Means 2). Implications regarding the types of support that might be beneficial for these student populations will be discussed, and relevant applications for […] (Benefits to the Attendees).

Sample Proposal 3.: Concluding rhetorical moves
> Results reveal Saudi L1 reading practices and beliefs about […] (Outcomes). In addition to sharing our findings, we will (a) offer strategies we have used to improve literacy skills and promote a culture of reading among Saudi learners of English […] (Benefits to the Attendees).

Conclusion

Learning to write in a new genre is always a daunting task. In some cases, the benefits for uncovering the mystery of writing successful CAs are of great importance: for many, participating in professional development opportunities, such as presenting at conferences, translate into greater professional experiences and positioning (promotions and tenure). While knowledge of genres can be seen as a form of cultural capital, we believe that all aspiring scholars should have access to knowledge of genres. By demystifying the process of writing a successful CA, the field of ELT may experience an explosion of classroom-based research led by classroom teachers.

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