

Theses 'Discussion' sections: A structural move analysis

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The current study aimed at finding the probable differences between the move structure of Iranian MA graduates' thesis discussion subgenres and those of their non-Iranian counterparts, on the one hand, and those of journal paper authors, on the other. It also aimed at identifying the moves that are considered obligatory, conventional, or optional by Iranian MA graduates. 46 ($N = 46$) masters thesis 'discussion' sections taken randomly from a pool of 93 discussions written in English by Iranian EFL students comprised the corpus for this study. The *AntMover* software as well as two human coders identified and coded the moves found in the corpus. The resulting move frequencies were compared to those of Rasmeenin's (2006) study as well as Yang and Allison's (2003) framework using a set of Mann-Whitney U tests as well as One-Sample t -Tests. Results indicated that there is a significant difference in the move frequency of the discussion sub-genre of MA theses written by Iranian versus non-Iranian EFL students. There was also a significant difference in the move frequency of the discussion sub-genre of MA theses written by Iranian EFL students and the discussion sub-genre of journal papers published in internationally recognized applied-linguistic journals. Obligatory, conventional, and optional moves were also identified. It was concluded that academic writing teachers need to focus on move structures and make their students move-sensitive.

Keywords: Genre Analysis; Move Analysis; Rhetoric; Writing; Thesis; Discussions Structure

1. Introduction

The question of how to teach writing in a second/foreign language has been at the center of attention for a good number of researchers and educators over the past several decades. Attempts at determining how to teach writing, and what to teach in writing courses, have resulted in a wealth of teaching methods, materials, and procedures, and the quest is still going on. More and more people are learning foreign/second languages, and their needs are getting ever-more varied. As such, different fields of Applied Linguistics have turned their eyes to the nature of writing and to what comprises a good piece

of written text. However, a close look at the literature on teaching writing reveals that most students, even those with high scores in English, often have difficulties in expressing themselves in writing. They have not only difficulties in choosing proper vocabulary and correct grammar rules but also in organizing the structure depending on topic.

Genre analysts have reasons to argue that a genre-analytic approach to the understanding of text structure, and to the teaching of writing, will result in L2/FL written success. This approach will help readers to understand and to achieve text objectives comprehensively. By the same token, the current researcher believes that, through genre-analytic approaches to L2/FL language teaching, students will become able to differentiate between different types of text, and that they will obtain useful information about the nature of different types of texts which eventually help them write better even when they engage in writing such academically complex genres as masters theses or PhD dissertations.

The problem, however, is that there is a dearth of research that describes the nature of written text from a genre-analytic perspective. This shortage is even more dramatic in Iran. There are only a few studies that have evaluated masters theses from a genre-analytic perspective. None, however, has focused on the move structure of the discussion sections of applied linguistics masters theses. The current study sought to identify the default move structure of masters thesis discussions and to provide pedagogical implications for EFL/ESL writing classes. This study also aimed at finding and describing the obligatory, conventional, and optional moves in the 'discussion' subgenre of a set of masters theses written by Iranian EFL learners. The study compared the move structure of masters thesis discussions written by Iranian EFL graduates with those of their non-Iranian counterparts, on the one hand, and those found in research articles, on the other.

2. Background

There are many studies that report on the different aspects of 'composing' processes and sub-processes. Over the past few decades studies focused on such processes as 'revising' (Sze, 2002), 'formulating' (Zimmerman, 2000), 'pausing' (Miller, 2000), 'reviewing and annotation of text' (Cresswell, 2000), 'summarizing' (Yang & Shi, 2003), and so on. The literature on writing also reports on variables that affect writing such as L2 proficiency, transfer from L1, writing fluency, writing strategies, and textual complexity (Aidman, 2002; Sasaki, 2000; Woodall, 2002).

More recently, some researchers reported on studies that implement the findings of genre-/move-based text analysis investigations in the teaching of writing. There are, however, not many such studies of this nature. Schindler

(2000) is perhaps the first to emphasize the importance of “text pattern knowledge” in relation to writing. Along the same lines, Silva and Brice (2004) noticed that while “work on text is still dominant in the literature, within textual studies there is a trend toward greater variety with regard to foci, context, genre, and level” (p. 72).

One area of writing which can benefit from genre-/move-based studies is writing the ‘discussion’ sub-genre. Students, for instance, often report that they have difficulty in writing the discussion section of their theses. This has been noticed by several scholars in the field of second/foreign language writing. (Swales & Feak, 1994; Swales & Feak, 2003; Wilkinson, 1991). Swales and Feak, for example, argued that “The problem is that Discussions vary considerably depending on a number of factors” (1994, p. 195). They noticed that one factor that determines this variability is the difference in the type of research questions that different studies set out to investigate; while some research questions require description of a particular phenomenon, others may be oriented towards finding solutions to a problem (Swales & Feak, 1994).

As such, “different types of questions require research writers to focus on different parts of the research such as the results section or the research methods section or the related literature in order to support their answers” (Rasmeenin, 2006, p.1). Another reason for this discrepancy may be due to the exact place in the research report which is dedicated to the ‘discussion’ sub-genre. Swales and Feak (1994) argued that where the discussion section is placed in the text tacitly implies that the audience have read and understood all the preceding sections. According to Rasmeenin (2006), while some writers begin the discussion subgenre by answering the research questions, others prefer to start by summarizing results or even highlighting the main findings. This indicates that there is no unanimously agreed-upon pattern for the writing of discussions. Therefore, it is not surprising that “this section is less uniformly structured than the others” (Sereebenjapol, 2003, p. 3).

In an attempt to present a unified framework for discussion writers based on which they can tailor their discussions to the communicative purpose they are normally expected to serve, Yang and Allison (2003) proposed a move-structure framework. This move framework was developed based on their previous studies that examined published research articles in applied linguistics. This framework identifies seven rhetorical moves that writers use in their discussions.

- **Move 1:** Background Information: Authors often use this move to restate the aims, objectives, procedural information, theories, and research questions (Weissberg & Buker, 1990). For this purpose,

authors often use metadiscursive elements (or metatext) to signal their move to the reader (e.g., the aim of this study was to . . .).

- **Move 2:** Reporting Results: Move 2 is used by authors to present the results of their studies. The main textual features that often signal this move are 'reporting verbs' and 'past tense'. The move is often made through the presentation of examples, numerical values, graphs, tables, or observations as well as comments on the expectedness and unexpectedness of outcomes (Rasmeenin, 2006). This is commonly known as data commentary.
- **Move 3:** Summarizing Results: this move differs from move 2 in that here only a summary of the results is presented whereas in move 2 particular results and factors are discussed.
- **Move 4:** Commenting on Results: Authors make this move for such purposes as providing subjective judgments about their studies' results, interpreting their findings, and comparing their studies with the literature (Rasmeenin, 2006). The move very often draws on one or a combination of these four steps: (1) Step A: Interpreting results, (2) Step B: Comparing/Contrasting results with literature, (3) Step C: Accounting for results, and (4) Step D: Evaluating results (For examples of each step, please see Yang & Allison, 2003).
- **Move 5:** Summarizing the Study: Here authors provide a summary of the whole study—but not just a summary of the results as in move 3. To this end, they often use such lexicogrammatical signals as the present perfect tense together with such words as 'study' and 'research' (Rasmeenin, 2006). This move is very often found at the end of discussions.
- **Move 6:** Evaluating the Study: Move six is often made by authors to judge their studies in terms of its significance, limitations, delimitations, generalizability, novelty, strengths, and weaknesses. Like move 4, this move, too, often draws on one or a combination of steps: (1) Step A: Indicating limitations, (2) Step B: Indicating significance/advantage, and/or (3) Step C: Evaluating methodology (Rasmeenin, 2006). To this end, authors often use 'positive' verbs to signal what their studies 'expand on' or 'add to' the literature, 'gain' new things, 'contribute' to the existing body of knowledge, 'are confined to' certain bounds, are 'only a means' to an end, 'do not claim being exhaustive', etc. (Ibid).
- **Move 7:** Deductions from Research: In this move authors often make suggestions concerning areas for further research or solutions to certain problems. They may as well provide implications for teaching.

The move is quite often made in one or a combination of steps: (1) Step A: Making suggestions, (2) Step B: Recommending further research, and/or (3) Step C: Drawing pedagogic implications.¹

The Yang and Allison (2003) framework, though not the only available framework, is the most comprehensive one. There are several other frameworks for move analysis (e.g., Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Peng, 1987). The Yang and Allison's move model is, however, preferred for several reasons. First, other frameworks do not belong to Applied Linguistics; since disciplinary variations in terms of communicative purposes and language use do exist, the Yang and Allison's move model is the most suitable framework for applied linguistics research (Holmes, 1997; Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Nwogu, 1997). Moreover, this model is an extension and modification of several other models, and its developers have found it to be the most comprehensive model for move analysis in Applied Linguistics (compare Holmes, 1997; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Peng, 1987; Yang & Allison, 2003).

3. METHOD

3.1. Corpus Procedures

This study is based on 46 ($N = 46$) 'discussion' sections taken from MA theses written in English by Iranian EFL students. To access a pool of 'discussion' sub-genres, emails were sent to theses supervisors/advisors/writers (selected through a snowball sampling procedure (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996)) and they were asked to provide the *.DOC files that contained the 'discussion' subgenres of the theses they had supervised/advised/written. Care was taken to obtain many more 'discussions' than were needed in the corpus. This procedure returned 107 discussions of which 93 were judged as free from grammatical and textual errors by both a post-graduate ESP professor and the author. It was important that the discussions be free from grammatical and textual errors since each text was to be submitted to the *AntMover* software for analysis. The assumption was that the texts—i.e., the discussions used as data—were error-free so that the software would not run into difficulty analyzing them. The 93 error-free discussions comprised the pool of data for this study. To determine how many of these discussions to be included in the study, the Cochran (1977) approach to determining sample size was used, and on this basis it was decided that 46 discussions from the pool of 93 discussions be included in the study. The 46 discussions were

¹ See Appendix A

selected through a simple random sampling procedure from among the 93 discussions present in the pool of data.

3.2. Instrumentation

The study made use of two types of instrumentations: The *AntMover* software (developed by Laurence Anthony, 2003) and the Yang-Allison (2003) 'discussion' move structure framework. The *AntMover* is an automatic text structure analyzer. Once a text file is opened in *AntMover*, it is imported into the program for analysis. The user can then choose up to four views of the file. Each discussion from the corpus was input to the *AntMover* to identify its move structure. The second instrument used in the study was the framework for the analysis of the move structure of 'discussion' sub-genre (Yang and Allison, 2003). This framework is designed for human coders. Human coders can use the steps and the moves depicted in this framework for the analysis of moves and steps in a 'discussion' corpus; it is important that frequencies and percentages for each move be found, and the results be used as the data. Human coders can also use such linguistic features as words, structures, hedging devices, and citations for the identification of moves and steps. They can also closely read each text and use such organizational clues as headings and subheadings for identifying moves and steps.

3.3. Data Procedures

After the required corpus was obtained, each text/discussion was assigned a unique code (e.g., D#1, D#2, D#3 . . . D#46). In the next step, a set of analyses were performed. A frequency count was performed to identify the total number of words in each discussion. Then each discussion was saved as a *.txt file to be submitted for move analysis to the *AntMover*.

A structural move analysis was also performed by two human coders who separately coded each discussion and identified the moves. Then the coders met and discussed their codings and compared them with the output from *AntMover*. Where there was a mismatch or difference in coding, it was resolved through extensive discussion, and where need, a third coder was asked to code the problematic 'discussion'. 12 out of the 46 discussions required the attention of an outside coder. It had been decided from the start of the study that wide disagreements and odd codings should definitely result in the faulty discussion's being discarded from the corpus—which fortunately did not happen.

The frequency of each move in each discussion was recorded; this was done to verify the extent to which any given move had been used. It was decided that, like in a similar study done by Rasmeenin (2006), moves be classified as obligatory (if the move was observed in 100% of the discussions),

conventional (if observed in 66% to 99% of the discussions), or optional (if in less than 66% of the discussions).

The recurring patterns or the uses of move cycles were totaled, averaged, and tabulated. This resulted in the identification of general move sequences and patterns. Then, the frequencies and percentages that ensued were used as the data that were then analyzed. The results of the move analysis of the sampled discussions were compared to those of the study done by Rasmeenin (2006). The frequencies reported by Rasmeenin (2006) were used as the expected frequencies and the frequencies found in the data set for the current study as observed frequencies. They were submitted to a chi-square analysis to test the null hypothesis that “there is no significant difference in the move structure of the discussion sub-genre of MA theses written by Iranian EFL students and that of non-Iranians.” The results of the move analysis of the sampled discussions were also compared to Yang and Allison’s seven-move model (2003) to determine to what extent the moves observed in the discussions from applied linguistics theses written by Iranian EFL graduates were similar to and/or different from the moves found by Yang and Allison (2003) for scholarly journal papers. The frequencies reported by Yang and Allison (2003) were used as the expected frequencies and the frequencies found in the data set for the current study as observed frequencies. They were submitted to a chi-square analysis to test the null hypothesis that “there is no significant difference in the move structure of the discussion sub-genre of MA theses written by Iranian EFL students and that of the discussion sub-genre of journal papers published in internationally recognized applied-linguistic journals.”

3.4. Validity and reliability

To estimate the convergent validity of the data, the frequencies identified by the human coders were totaled and averaged and then correlated with the frequencies obtained through *AntMover*. This was done through the use of a one-tailed bivariate correlation analysis using Spearman’s rho. The resulting value ($rho = .894$) indicated a very good index of validity. As to the reliability of the data, the Intercoder Agreement was evaluated. The frequencies identified by the human coders were correlated through another one-tailed bivariate correlation analysis using Spearman’s rho. The reliability index was high enough to make the study reliable ($rho = .931$).

4. Data Analysis

The word count for the 46 discussions revealed that a total of 157,259 words had been used by the writers in writing the 46 discussions. The average word count for the discussions was 3418.67 words per discussion. The range was

6318 with the shortest discussion consisting of 1054 words and the longest 7372 words. A total of 1233 moves were identified in the corpus.

Move 2 (i.e., reporting results) was the most frequent move ($f=343$); it accounted for 27.82% of the moves observed in the corpus. Move 4 (i.e., commenting on results) with a frequency of 224 ($f=224$) and move 7 (i.e., deducing from the results with a frequency of 223 ($f=223$) were the second and third most frequent moves. Move 1 (i.e., providing background information; $f=196$) and move 3 (summarizing results; $f=137$) were next. The least frequent moves were move 5 (i.e., summarizing the study; $f=57$) and move 6 (i.e., evaluating the study; $f=53$).

Inferential statistical analyses were also conducted to test the null hypotheses of the study and to provide data-based answers to the research questions of the study. The study attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1) Is there any significant difference in the move frequency of the discussion sub-genre of MA theses written by Iranian EFL students and their non-Iranian counterparts.
- 2) Is there any significant difference in the move frequency of the discussion sub-genre of MA theses written by Iranian EFL students and that of the discussion sub-genre of scholarly journal papers in applied linguistics.
- 3) What are the obligatory (or key), optional, and conventional moves in the discussion sub-genre of Iranian EFL students' MA theses in Applied Linguistics?

To answer the first question, the observed move frequencies in the current study were compared to those of Rasmeenin (2006). A Mann-Whitney U test was performed on the data. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Seven Moves in Rasmeenin (2006) vs. this Study

	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	r
Move1	64.000	1145.0	-3.286	.001	.443
Move2	25.500	1106.5	-4.143	.000	.559
Move3	34.000	1115.0	-3.992	.000	.538
Move4	26.500	1107.5	-4.165	.000	.562
Move5	106.0	151.0	-2.56	.010	.345
Move6	124.5	169.50	-1.987	.047	.268
Move7	85.500	1166.5	-2.788	.005	.376

Moreover, a median analysis was conducted to determine the effect sizes. Table 2 displays the results for this analysis.

Table 2

Median Analysis for the Seven Moves in Rasmeenin (2006) vs. this Study

	Move1	Move2	Move3	Move4	Move5	Move6	Move7
Current Study	4.00	6.50	2.00	4.00	1.0	1.0	4.0
Rasmeenin (2006)	7.00	29.0	8.00	17.0	.00	.00	9.0
Total	4.00	7.00	2.00	4.00	1.0	1.0	5.0

The analyses revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the Iranian and non-Iranian MA graduates in terms of the frequency of moves in the discussion subgenre of their MA theses. As for move 1 (i.e., Providing background information), the Mann-Whitney U test indicated the existence of a significant difference between the Iranian MA graduates ($Md = 4.00, n = 46$) and their non-Iranian counterparts ($Md = 7.00, n = 9$), $U = 64.00, z = -3.286, r = .443$. The r value is calculated by dividing the observed z by the square root of N and is used for determining the effect size. According to Cohen (1988), the r value equal to .1 indicates small effect, .3 shows medium effect, and .5 shows large effect. Therefore, the size of the observed difference between the two groups in terms of move 1 was large.

The Mann-Whitney U test results also indicated a meaningful difference in terms of move 2 (i.e., Reporting results) between the Iranian group ($Md = 6.50, n = 46$) and the non-Iranian counterpart ($Md = 29.00, n = 9$), $U = 25.50, z = -4.143, r = .559$. Again the size of the difference was large. The third move (i.e., Summarizing results) was also different for the sample from the Iranian group ($Md = 2.00, n = 46$) and its non-Iranian counterpart ($Md = 8.00, n = 9$), $U = 34.00, z = -3.992, r = .538$. Move 4 (i.e., Commenting on results), too, revealed a similar difference [Iranian: $Md = 4.00, n = 46$]; non-Iranian: $Md = 17.00, n = 9$), $U = 26.50, z = -4.165, r = .562$]. The same was true for move 5 (i.e., Summarizing the study) [Iranian: $Md = 1.00, n = 46$]; non-Iranian: $Md = 0.00, n = 9$), $U = 106.00, z = -2.560, r = .345$]. Move 6 (i.e., Evaluating the study) was not that different either [Iranian: $Md = 1, n = 46$]; non-Iranian: $Md = 0.00, n = 9$), $U = 124.50, z = -1.987, r = .268$]. Finally, move 7 (i.e., Deductions from the research) also revealed a somewhat similar pattern [Iranian: $Md = 4.00, n = 46$]; non-Iranian: $Md = 9.00, n = 9$), $U = 85.5, z = -2.788, r = .376$]. These findings indicated that there is a significant difference in the move frequency of the discussion sub-genre of MA theses written by Iranian EFL students and that of non-Iranians.

A one sample t tests was also performed for each move. The observed move frequencies were converted into percentages to make the scale of the data interval. The resulting percentages were then compared to the percentages reported by Yang and Allison (2003) in the literature. The results reported by

Yang and Allison (2003) were used as the test values for the present study because this study took their framework as the standard framework for writing discussion subgenres. Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics for the seven moves. Table 4 presents the results of the set of One-Sample *t*-Tests for the Seven Moves.

Table 3
One-Sample Descriptive Statistics for the Seven Moves

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Move1 Background Information	46	4.26	3.12	0.46
Move2 Reporting Results	46	7.46	4.73	0.7
Move3 Summarizing Results	46	2.98	2.83	0.42
Move4 Commenting on Results	46	4.87	2.85	0.42
Move5 Summarizing the Study	46	1.24	1.16	0.17
Move6 Evaluating the Study	46	1.15	1.17	0.17
Move7 Deductions from the Research	46	4.85	2.84	0.42

Table 4
One-Sample t-Test for the Seven Moves

	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	γ
Move1 Background Information	2.962	45	.005	1.36087	0.14
Move2 Reporting Results	-17.424	45	.000	-12.14348	0.54
Move3 Summarizing Results	-9.391	45	.000	-3.92174	0.49
Move4 Commenting on Results	-79.351	45	.000	-33.33043	4.10
Move5 Summarizing the Study	-9.725	45	.000	-1.66087	1.24
Move6 Evaluating the Study	-33.229	45	.000	-5.74783	4.17
Move7 Deductions from the Research	-42.454	45	.000	-17.75217	2.21

As table 4 indicates, there was a significant difference between the moves employed by Iranian MA graduates in writing their discussion subgenres and the standard moves that are normally expected in this subgenre. The γ values reported in Table 4. show the size of the observed difference. According to Howell (1995), a $\gamma = .2$ shows a small effect, a $\gamma = .5$ shows a medium effect, and a $\gamma = .8$ shows large effect. The γ values were calculated through the following equation: $\gamma = \mu_1 - \mu_0 / \sigma$.

There was a meaningful difference between this study and the standard framework proposed by Yang and Allison (2003) in terms of the first move (i.e., Providing background Information). The Iranian MA graduates did not follow the standards of practice in using move 1 in writing their discussion subgenres [$M = 4.26$, $SD = 3.12$; $t = 2.962$, $p = .005$, $\gamma = .14$]. The size of the effect for move 1 was very small. The same was true for move 2 (i.e., Reporting Results). The Iranian population was not observant of the standard practice [$M = 7.46$, $SD = 4.73$; $t = -17.424$, $p = .000$, $\gamma = .54$]. The size of the

effect in this case was medium. As for move 3 (i.e., Summarizing Results), like move 2, the size of the effect was almost medium [$M = 2.98$, $SD = 2.83$; $t = -9.391$, $p = .000$, $\eta = .49$]. The observed difference for move 4 (i.e., Commenting on Results) was really shocking. There was a huge difference between the Iranian sample and the Yang-Allison (2003) framework [$M = 4.87$, $SD = 2.85$; $t = -79.351$, $p = .000$, $\eta = 4.10$]. Move 5 (i.e., Summarizing the Study) was no exception. The size of the effect for this move was also large [$M = 1.24$, $SD = 1.16$; $t = -9.725$, $p = .000$, $\eta = 1.24$]. Move 6 (i.e., Evaluating the Study) was very much like move 4. The size of the observed difference was very large [$M = 1.15$, $SD = 1.17$; $t = -33.229$, $p = .000$, $\eta = 4.17$]. Finally, move 7 (i.e., Deductions from the Research) also showed a large effect size [$M = 4.85$, $SD = 2.84$; $t = -42.454$, $p = .000$, $\eta = 2.21$].

The study also aimed at finding which moves were considered obligatory, which conventional, and which optional by Iranian MA graduates. This required a qualitative evaluation of the data and the corpus (based on the percentages presented in section 3.3 above). Table 5 displays the percentages of move occurrence in Rasmeenin (2006) and the current study.

Table 5
Percentages of Move Occurrence

	What happens in the move	% of move occurrence	
		Rasmeenin (2006)	Current Study
Move 1	Back ground Information	100%	93.48%
Move 2	Reporting Result	100%	100%
Move 3	Summarizing Result	100%	93.48%
Move 4	Commenting on Result	100%	100%
Move 5	Summarizing the Study	44%	82.61%
Move 6	Evaluating the study	33%	60.87%
Move 7	Deductions from Research	100%	100%

As it can be seen from Table 5, there were no conventional moves in Rasmeenin's (2006) study; moves 5 and 6 were optional and the remaining moves were all obligatory. In the present study, however, all the three move types were seen. Moves 2, 4, and 7 were considered obligatory. Moves 1, 3, and 5 were considered as conventional moves by Iranian MA graduates. Finally, only move 6 was considered by Iranian MA graduates to be the optional move. This answers the third research question above.

5. Discussion

A meaningful difference was found between the move composition of discussion subgenres written by Iranian MA graduates and those of their non-Iranian counterparts as reported by Rasmeenin (2006). The difference observed may in part be due to the difference in sample size; while the

current study used 46 discussions in its corpus, the study by Rasmeenin was based only on nine discussions.

A meaningful difference was also found between the move composition of discussion subgenres written by Iranian MA graduates and those of journal paper authors (as reported by Yang and Allison, 2003). Since the Yang-Allison framework for move analysis is often taken as the parameter for the evaluation of the move structure of discussion subgenres, the discrepancy between the corpus of the current study and that of yang and Allison (2003) is somewhat unfavorable. It can only be justified if we take journal-paper discussions and MA-thesis discussions to be totally different and unrelated pieces of writing, which often is not the case; many research papers published in journals are reports based on MA theses, after all. It is, therefore, normally expected that the two pieces of writing be positively correlated.

It seems that this difference shows that enough attention is not given to 'moves' and 'move structure' in EFL writing classes. Iranian MA graduates find it difficult to make deductions from their data (i.e., move 7), to evaluate their studies (i.e., move 6), and to comment on the results of their studies (i.e., move 4). EFL writing courses at MA level should therefore make MA students move-sensitive when they start to produce academic genres and subgenres. It should also be noted that Iranian MA graduates do not like to evaluate their own studies (i.e., move 6) and take this move to be optional. This may have to do with a cultural schema—which implies that a work should be evaluated by an outsider. Teachers of academic writing should tell MA students that self-evaluation is a common practice in EFL writing.

In writing each subgenre, the writer is expected to ask himself/herself a question: What is the communicative purpose of this subgenre? For instance, Yang and Allison (2003) argued that the major communicative purpose of the 'results' subgenre is to 'report the results' whereas that of the 'discussion' subgenre is to 'comment on results'. However, the percentage of 'commenting on results' in the thesis corpus of this study was far less than that of Yang and Allison's study. The reason for this dissimilarity may be that Iranian MA graduates prefer objective 'reports of results' to subjective 'commentaries and evaluations'. This behavior may tacitly suggests that the results of a study can stand on their own, no matter whether there is any commentary following them. This claim, however, needs further research.

Another explanation for this observation may lie in the preferences of the individual universities (from which the corpus was sampled) or the theses supervisors. Perhaps, universities and supervisors have different preferences. This claim, too, needs further research. It is possible to develop qualitative research designs which seek to interview university authorities and thesis

supervisors to see if their preferences affect the overall structure of thesis subgenres.

Another point implied by the results of this study is that Iranian theses rely heavily on 'providing background information' (i.e., move 1). The reason for this is not clear. One possible explanation is perhaps thesis writers' worries about the validity of their research findings. Too much reliance on background information seems to mix the function of 'literature review' with that of 'discussion'. So much reliance on 'providing background information' is not that acceptable when one takes the thesis readership into account; for example, Thompson (2001, p. 80) stated that theses should be written "on a level of parity (neither speaking up nor down to the reader)" (i.e., to researchers in the same field). This means that the thesis readership is not 'naïve' and does not need to see a lot of 'background information' in the 'discussion' subgenre. The validity of these claims, however, requires further research.

While three moves (i.e., move 2: Reporting Results, move 4: Commenting on Result, and move 7: Deductions from Research) in the corpus of this study were obligatory, Yang and Allison (2003) reported move 4 as the only obligatory move in their study. This lack of match may be due to sample size. Yang and Allison had only eight discussions in their corpus. When the sample size is so small, the findings may not be that reliable. The current study, however, took maximum care to include an acceptable number of discussions in its corpus so that the findings could be reliable.

Studies other than that of Yang and Allison (2003) also reported move 2 (i.e., Reporting Results) as an obligatory move although they used different labels (e.g., Statement of results, Consolidating results, etc.) for it (cf., Dudley-Evans, 1994; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Peng, 1987). No study, however, reported move 7 (i.e., Deductions from Research) as an obligatory move. The reason for the obligatory use of move 7 in the corpus of this study may lie in the nature of the theses sampled for this study. Since thesis supervisors in applied linguistics often emphasize the pedagogical dimension of MA theses, it is not surprising that move 7 was considered as an obligatory move by Iranian MA graduates. None of the previous studies had been done in an applied field.

This study found three moves to be obligatory in the 'discussion' subgenre of MA theses in applied linguistics: (a) Move 2 or 'Reporting Results', (b) move 4 or 'Commenting on Results', and (c) move 7 or 'Deductions from Research'. It is, however, important to notice that MA theses in applied linguistics written by Iranian MA graduates include several chapters each with its specific subgenres. For example, chapter five in almost every MA thesis in applied linguistics in Iran includes such sections as 'pedagogical implication' and

'suggestions for further research'. As such, it is not known why such moves should appear in a section that is dedicated to 'discussing' the findings of a research study.

6. Conclusion

A pedagogical suggestion, based on this study, would be that academic writing instructors be aware of the standard move structure of 'discussion' subgenre and overtly tell their MA students that such moves are to be included in their MA theses 'discussions'. Course materials may include thesis 'discussion' samples to be analyzed with a move structure focus. Once analysis is done, MA students may be given research articles with the 'discussions' removed, and may be required to write discussions for them while observing the required move structure. This practice will make MA students move-sensitive and will finally foster in them the ability to write good 'discussions'. The same strategy can be used for other subgenres as well.

Moreover, materials developers can also use results from genre studies to develop materials that make MA students move-sensitive. In developing such materials attention should be given to teaching and learning of metatextual vocabulary which is suitable for writing research reports.

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Appendix A. Sample Analysis

This Appendix provide a sample move analysis for a discussion. For ease of reference, the Yang-Allison Move Model has been reproduced here:

What happens in the move/step	
Move 1	Back ground Information
Move 2	Reporting Result
Move 3	Summarizing Result
Move 4	Commenting on Result
	Step 1 • <i>Interpreting Result</i>
	Step 2 • <i>Comparing Result with Literature</i>
	Step 3 • <i>Accounting for Result</i>
	Step 4 • <i>Evaluating result</i>
Move 5	Summarizing the Study
Move 6	Evaluating the study
	Step 1 • <i>Indicating Limitations</i>
	Step 2 • <i>Indicating Significance</i>
	Step 3 • <i>Evaluating Methodology</i>
Move 7	Deductions from Research
	Step 1 • <i>Making Suggestions</i>
	Step 2 • <i>Recommending Further Research</i>
	Step 3 • <i>Drawing Pedagogic Implications</i>

Framework for the Analysis of Moves of the Discussion Sections of Research Reports

Here is the analysis.

	Move(Step)
The present study set out to find answers to a number of questions delineated in section 10 of chapter one. However, the results of data analysis reported in the previous sections can provide answers to a good number of other questions as well. On the whole, the findings of this investigation can be re-classified into a minimum of thirteen classes of aims . In this section, the findings of the study as they relate to these classes are discussed.	M5
One of the major aims of the study was to determine if subjects' level of proficiency introduced any difference in	M1

their task performance at each specific point along the text-familiarity cline.	
The findings of the study indicated that subjects' performances of the true-false and skimming tasks when the tasks appeared in a test with totally familiar propositional content were a function of their level of proficiency.	M2
In the same context, the performance of only the semi-proficient subjects compared to the non-proficient subjects did not show any meaningful difference on sentence-completion, outlining, and writer's-view tasks. In the context of a reading test with partially familiar propositional content, only the performance difference observed between semi-proficient and non-proficient subjects when performing true-false, sentence-completion, writer's-view, and outlining tasks was not significant. Moreover, in the context of a reading text with totally unfamiliar propositional content, only the performance difference observed between semi-proficient versus non-proficient subjects when performing true-false, sentence-completion, outlining, and writer's-view tasks was statistically significant.	M3
A second aim of the study was to determine whether there was any meaningful relationship between subjects' level of proficiency and their test performance in the context of text-familiarity cline. Literature is full of reports that envisage the existence of such a relationship. However, the existance of this kind of relationship cannot be taken for granted in the context of LSP testing.	M1
The results of the present study indicated that subjects' test performance was a function of their level of proficiency, no matter whether the propositional content of the test was totally familiar, partially familiar, or totally unfamiliar. In other words, at all points on the text-familiarity cline, proficiency affects performance differentially.	M2
Moreover, the study aimed at finding out whether subjects' level of proficiency affected their test performance regardless of the probable effect of text familiarity.	M1

<u>The literature is also full of reports that maintain the existence of such an impact.</u>	M4(S2)
<u>The results of the present study also supported this contention.</u> The level of proficiency of the subjects affected their test performance when the test consisted of a combination of totally familiar, partially familiar, and totally unfamiliar types of propositional content.	M4(S4)
<u>The study also aimed</u> at determining the probable impact of subjects' degree of text-familiarity on their test performance.	M1
<u>The results of the study indicated that such an influence did exist.</u>	M2
Background knowledge of the propositional content of reading tests affected performance positively. The subjects of the study performed significantly better on tests with totally-familiar propositional content. This finding lends credence to the existence of a text-familiarity cline. Moreover, the results indicated that the performance of subjects at each point on this cline differed from their performance at each of the other points. The results also revealed that not only complete text-familiarity but also degrees of it serve as an advantage for subjects taking a reading test.	M3
This finding takes sides with the claims of <u>Alderson and Urquhart (1985), and Clapham (1996).</u>	M4(S2)
Another <u>aim of the study</u> was to find out if there was any meaningful relationship between text familiarity and task performance. In other words, the study <u>aimed at</u> determining if subjects performed the same task with any significant variation across different levels of the text-familiarity cline.	M1
<u>The results of the study</u> supported this contention, and indicated that subjects' performance on a particular task at any given point on the text-familiarity cline differed significantly from their performance on the same task at any other point on the text-familiarity cline.	M2
This finding is also in line with <u>Clapham's (1996) claims.</u>	M4(S2)

<p>A somewhat different aim of the study was to explain how subjects' level of proficiency differentially affected their performance on a given task across different text-familiarity levels.</p>	<p>M1</p>
<p>The results, after analysis, indicated that subjects' performance on the true-false, outlining, and skimming tasks varied in accordance to their level of proficiency when these tasks appeared in tests with totally familiar, partially familiar, or totally unfamiliar propositional content. However, the difference observed between semi-proficient and non-proficient subjects when performing sentence-completion and writer's-view tasks on tests of varying degrees of familiar propositional content was not statistically significant.</p>	<p>M2</p>
<p>This supports the "reading threshold" hypothesis. In other words, in order to be able to draw on prior knowledge (that is, to activate schemata), readers need to have already reached a specific level of language proficiency (a threshold level) to be able to disentangle themselves from the web of formal and structural features of the text.</p> <p>The impact of task type on subjects' test performance was also studied in the context of text familiarity.</p>	<p>M4(S2)</p>
<p>The purpose of this probe was to determine if subjects' performance on one task was comparable to their performance on other tasks at the same text-familiarity level.</p>	<p>M1</p>
<p>The difference between the sentence-completion task and all the other tasks (true-false, outlining, writer's-view, and skimming) revealed significant when these tasks appeared in tests with varying degrees of familiar propositional content. In addition, in tests with totally unfamiliar propositional content, the difference between the true-false task and the writer's-view task was also meaningful</p> <p>The impact of task type on subjects' test performance was also studied in the context of subjects' overall test performance (i.e., regardless of the text-familiarity cline).</p>	<p>M4(S3)</p>
<p>The difference between the sentence-completion and true-</p>	<p>M4(S3)</p>

false tasks, on the one hand, and all the other tasks, on the other, turned out to be significant.	
The one-to-one comparison of the remaining tasks also afforded significant results . However, there were three exceptions: (a) outlining versus writer's-view, (b) outlining versus skimming, and (c) writer's-view versus skimming. These comparisons afforded no significant results.	M6
Another step taken in the study was to determine if the interaction between two or more of the independent variables (i.e., subjects' proficiency level, task type, and text-familiarity cline) introduced any meaningful difference in subjects' test and task performance. Subjects' task performance was studied in the context of the interaction between subjects' degree of text-familiarity and level of proficiency.	M1
The results indicated that this interaction only affected subjects' performance of the true-false and outlining tasks in a significant way. The writer's-view , sentence-completion, and skimming tasks were not influenced in a meaningful way by this interaction. As for subjects' overall test performance, the interaction between text familiarity and task type appeared significant. Subjects' overall test performance was also affected by the interaction between text familiarity and language proficiency in a meaningful way. Moreover, the interaction between task type and language proficiency caused a meaningful difference in subjects' overall test performance. Finally, the interaction among text familiarity, task type, and language proficiency was an important source of variance in subjects' overall test performance.	M2
A comparison of the results of regression analyses reported in this study with the findings of Clapham's (1996) study is intriguing indeed. While Clapham attaches greater importance to text familiarity (accounting for 38% of the variance) in comparison to language proficiency (accounting for 26% of the variance), the present investigation came up with a somewhat different result . As intriguing as it may seem, in none of the comparisons made between any given pair of the independent variables under study in relation to subjects' overall as well as differential test	M5, M4(S2), & M4(S3)

<p>and task performances did language proficiency account for less than 50% of the variance. Moreover, the very high tolerance indexes reported in this study reject any chance for multi-collinearity to occur.</p>	
<p><u>This indicates that the findings of the present study</u> are far from being sample-dependent. A quick look at the tolerance indexes reported in the regression tables above reveals that, in each case, the collinearity statistic was equal to 01.00 which signifies the lack of multi-collinearity. Moreover, the effect of text familiarity on task performance was found to be smaller than the effect of task type. On these grounds, it can safely be argued that perhaps the development and use of LSP tests is out of consideration.</p>	<p>M2</p>
<p>As such, <u>the results of this study</u> are somewhat close to <u>Lipson's (1984) contention</u> that LSP testing is not really justified. The greater impact of task type, in comparison to text familiarity, on subjects' performance, however, stands <u>against Lipson's claims. The findings of the study indicate that</u>, instead of giving students passages with esoteric propositional content, it is better to give them a rich variety of reading tasks, and measure their performances on them.</p>	<p>M5, & M4(S2)</p>