A Comparative Analysis of Conclusion Moves in Chinese and Foreign Master's Theses in Applied Linguistics

Tingyi Chen

English, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, 330224, China

2416600504@qq.com

Abstract. The study aims to investigate the differences in move analysis of conclusion sections between Chinese and foreign masters' theses in applied linguistics, using a corpus-based approach. This study employs a quantitative approach, analyzing a corpus with 45,856 words, formed by a total of 40 conclusion sections of masters' theses in applied linguistics from 2020-2021. This study provides insights into the differences in conclusion writing between Chinese and foreign masters' theses, shedding light on the former's emphasis on systematic and comprehensive writing. The findings also contribute to the enhancement of academic writing skills and the understanding of the move structure of academic writings, particularly the conclusion section.

Keywords: Genre structure; move; conclusion; applied linguistics; corpus.

1   Introduction

With the increasing globalization, academic exchanges are becoming more frequent. Academic writings, as a crucial tool for academic exchanges, used to conduct and describe research results. Most studies on the move structure of academic papers focus on a particular section of the paper. Among the sections of an academic writing, the abstract and introduction are the most commonly researched, while the conclusion is researched less frequently. In the study of move structure of the conclusion section, scholars have primarily focused on analyzing journal papers within a specific field, with fewer comparative studies conducted. Existing comparative studies have mainly compared interdisciplinary journals or Chinese and foreign scholars' journals within a specific field, with fewer comparisons made between theses. Studying the move structure of masters' theses can help identify and analyze common problems in academic writing. In addition, applied linguistics is a major research direction in English Language and Literature. Consequently, this study aims to answer these questions: "(1) To what extent does the selected corpus conform to the 4-move conclusion model? (2) In the field of applied linguistics, what are the differences in move analysis of the conclusion section between Chinese and foreign masters' theses?"

2   Literature Review

Dudley-Evans took the conclusion part of the masters' degree theses as the research object and concluded that the move structure in the conclusions of the was "Introduction-Evaluation-Conclusion" [1]. Yang and Allison proposed a structured three-move approach for conclusions: M1 (Summarizing the study), M2 (Evaluating the study and M3 (Deductions from the research) [2]. Jahangard et al. compared the conclusion section of English RAs in the field of Mechanical Engineering and Applied Linguistics, based on Dadley-Evans's move model [3]. It showed significant differences between the moves employed in the two disciplines. Zamani and Ebadi analyzed the conclusion of RAs written in Persian and English in the fields of Civil Engineering and Applied Linguistics, based on Yang and Allison's move model [4]. They found that no significant differences are observed between the conclusions of Applied Linguistics and Civil Engineering RAs. Gu Zhongmei, Li Weichao and Duan Tianting all adopt Yang and Allison's model to explore the move structure of conclusion. Gu examined English scientific papers, identifying four discourse moves: summarizing the study, indicating main contributions, presenting limitations, and suggesting future research [5]. Li proposed a new move model of the conclusion sections in applied linguistics which contains five moves: Background information, Summarizing the study, Explaining results, Evaluating the study and Deductions from the study [6]. Duan, focusing on linguistic papers, validated Yang and Allison's model with four additional moves: summarizing the research process, results, reiterating key points, and emphasizing outcomes [7].

3   Methodology

3.1   Data Collection

A corpus will be compiled from two databases, China Master's Degree Thesis Database (CMFD) and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT). This study randomly selects master's theses in applied linguistics from 2020-2021 which are clearly labeled with "Conclusion" for the establishment of the corpus. A total of 20 Chinese masters' theses and 20 foreign masters' theses meeting the requirements are obtained.

3.2   Model

As the theses pertain to applied linguistics, the moves will be carefully analyzed utilizing a model adapted from Yang and Alison's model. Bitchener's study on the move structure of the conclusion section in applied linguistics suggests including an introductory discourse move at the beginning of the conclusion section to serve as a reminder of the study's purpose or methodological features [8]. Consequently, a modified four-move model in Table 1 incorporates an introductory move at the start of the conclusion, which serves as a reminder of the study's purpose and methodological features. The revised model consists of the following moves:

Table 1. The model used in this study

Move	Step
Move 1-Introductory information	Introducing the contents of the chapter or explaining the purpose and process
Move 2-Summarizing the study	
Move 3-Evaluating the study	Step1-Indicating significance/advantage
	Step2-Indicating limitations
Move 4-Deductions from the research	Step1-Recommending further research
	Step2-Drawing pedagogic implications

3.3   Label and Analysis

Chinese and foreign theses are manually annotated on moves and steps. Following the four-move model in Table 1, sentences in conclusions are regarded as the smallest unit. Each move of a conclusion is recognized and marked according to their semantics and contents. For ease of labeling, move is abbreviated as M and step is abbreviated as S. In the following, this form of denotation will be used for both moves and steps. Because of the personal subjectivity involved in the identification of conclusion speech steps, two additional checks are performed after the first labeling in order to make the move analysis more accurate and objective. After labeling, it is to import the data into Excel for statistics and analysis. Based on the research questions, the analysis of move is carried out from three aspects: the number of moves in conclusions, the occurrence of moves and the structure of moves. For each aspect, this study first analyze CMT, then analyze FMT, and finally make a contrastive analysis of them.

4   Results and Discussion

The analysis of the conclusion section is guided by the model in Table 1. For the convenience, the Chinese masters' theses are simply called CMT, while foreign masters' theses are called FMT. Table 2 presents a basic picture of the conclusion section of the theses. The longer average word count of CMT may reflect the emphasis on exhaustive and in-depth analysis in the Chinese academic tradition. In contrast, FMT may favor brevity, which may be a feature of the Western academic tradition that emphasizes direct and efficient information exchange. In addition, Chinese students may have been encouraged to write more detailed and comprehensive papers during their education, whereas foreign students may have focused more on clear and concise communication.

Table 2. Basic information on the conclusion section of masters' theses

	CMT	FMT
Total number of words	31063	14793
Average number of words	1553	740

In order to explore the number of moves in conclusions, this paper analyses the corpus without considering the repetition of each move. Moreover, whenever any step under the move appears in the thesis, the thesis is considered to contain this move. The results of number and percentage of moves in the corpus are shown in Table 3. It can be seen that the completeness of the move structure of FMT is obviously inferior to that of CMT, which indicates that foreign students pay less attention to the composition of the conclusion moves and that their use of moves is less standardized. The lack of clear awareness of move structure and standardized use of moves will affect the logical expression of the conclusion and the actual communicative effect of the moves.

Table 3. Number and percentage of moves in conclusions

Number of moves	CMT (number/percentage)	FMT (number/percentage)	Total (number/percentage)
1 move	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	2 (5%)
2 moves	0 (0%)	3 (15%)	3 (7.5%)
3 moves	2 (10%)	8 (40%)	10 (25%)
4 moves	18 (90%)	7 (35%)	25 (62.5%)

After the refinement of statistics, the occurrence of moves and steps of the two groups is shown in Table 4. Based on Kanoksilapatham's criteria for defining steps, i.e., if a step appears in all articles, it is recognized as an obligatory move; if it appears in no less than 60% of the articles, it is recognized as a conventional move; and if it appeared in less than 60% of the articles, it is recognized as an optional move[9]. It shows that all the moves and steps appear in the conclusion section of both groups. The conclusions of the CMT have four mandatory moves (M1, M2, M3, M4); while the conclusions of the FMT have only one mandatory move (M2), two conventional moves (M3, M4) and one optional move (M1). It reflects that Chinese masters seem to have developed a patterned idea of what the conclusion section contains.

In addition, considering each step in two groups. Foreign students share a similar level of understanding and emphasis with Chinese students in summarizing the findings, pointing out the significance or strengths of the study, and making suggestions for further research. Foreign students' understanding and emphasis of introductory information, indicating limitations, and the need for pedagogic implications, however, is different from that of Chinese students.

Then carefully analyzing the steps of M3 and M4. In consideration of M3, the evaluation move in the conclusion section of theses tends to focus on limitations rather than indicate significance or advantage. This trend reflects a natural inclination within the academic community to self-critique and maintain a posture of scholarly skepticism. It also raises concerns about the potential oversight of research contributions. In M4, the deductions from the research, there is a predominance of recommending further research instead of drawing pedagogic implications, which reveals an orientation towards theory-building and the expansion of knowledge within the academic community. Researchers in this vein may prioritize the development of conceptual frameworks and the exploration of new ideas, which are essential for the progress of their field. Furthermore, M3S1, M3S2, M4S1, and M4S2 all appear at higher rates in CMT than they do in FMT. It means that Chinese students pay more attention to evaluate the study and make the deductions from the research. This reflects that Chinese students might place

a stronger emphasis on self-reflection and the demonstration of analytical skills. This could be due to differences in teaching methods, assessment criteria, and the expectations of supervisors and academic mentors.

Table 4. Occurrence of moves/steps

Move/Step	Number (Frequency)	
	CMT	FMT
M1	18 (90%)	10 (50%)
M2	20 (100%)	20 (100%)
M3	20 (100%)	12 (60%)
M3S1	12 (60%)	9 (45%)
M3S2	20 (100%)	10 (50%)
M4	20 (100%)	18 (90%)
M4S1	20 (100%)	17 (85%)
M4S2	14 (70%)	7 (35%)

To further refine the differences between the two, the present study explores the characteristics of the move structure of the corpus and the details are shown in Table 5. The results show that CMT only have 6 different move structures and more than half of the theses focus on one type of them, indicating a strong emphasis on a comprehensive conclusion section and reflects a desire for a clear and systematic presentation for Chinese students. The greater variety of move structures in FMT, with no single structure dominating, points to a more flexible approach to write conclusion among foreign students. This could be influenced by a broader range of educational backgrounds, diverse cultural perspectives on research presentation, and perhaps a greater emphasis on individual expression within the academic tradition of the foreign students' home countries. There are also similarities in the move structure of CMT and FMT, some of which are done to emphasize an important point, some of which are analyzed from different perspectives, and some of which are done because of a failure to recognize and distinguish the functions of the steps well.

Table 5. Move Structure

CMT		FMT	
Move Structure	Number (Frequency)	Move Structure	Number (Frequency)
M1+M2+M3+M4	11 (55%)	M1+M2+M4	3 (15%)
M1+M2+M4+M3+M4	5 (25%)	M2+M3+M4	3 (15%)
M1+M3+M2+M3+M4	1 (5%)	M2+M4	2 (10%)
M1+M2+M4+M3	1 (5%)	M2	2 (10%)
M2+M4+M3+M4	1 (5%)	M1+M2+M4+M3+M4	2 (10%)
M2+M3+M4	1 (5%)	M1+M3+M2+M3+M4	2 (10%)
		M1+M2+M3+M4	1 (5%)
		M1+M2+M4+M3	1 (5%)
		M2+M4+M3+M4	1 (5%)
		M4+M3+M2+M3	1 (5%)
		M1+M2+M3	1 (5%)
		M4+M2+M4	1 (5%)

5   Conclusion

Chinese theses tend to exhibit a more complete and structured move pattern. In contrast, foreign theses display a more diverse range of move structures. Chinese theses tend to pay greater attention to evaluating the limitations of their research and making pedagogic implications. In contrast, foreign theses may not have a significant focus on certain types of moves. These findings provide valuable insights into the cultural and contextual factors that influence academic writing practices. They highlight the importance of understanding and adapting to different writing conventions in order to effectively communicate research findings in an international academic context. In addition, the study contributes to the enhancement of academic writing skills and the understanding of move structures in academic writings.

The present study also has some limitations. First, the relatively small sample size may limit the discovery of more features of the move stricture. Moreover, the moves were divided artificially, and even though they were examined several times, the labeling of some moves is inevitably controversial. Third, this study only compared the sections explicitly labeled "Conclusion", lacking consideration of other sections. Therefore, future research could expand the sample size and examine the relationships and structural features between the different sections. In addition, comparisons can be made from a wider range of perspectives.

References

1. Dudley-Evans, T. (1994). Genre Analysis: an Approach to Text Analysis for ESP [A]. In M. Coulthard (ed.). Advances in Written Text Analysis [C]. London: Routledge.
2. Yang, R., & D. Allison. (2003). Research Articles in Applied Linguistics: Moving from Results to Conclusions [J]. English.for Specific Purposes.
3. Jahangard, A., A. Rajabi. & K. Khalaji. (2014). A Comparison of Moves in Conclusion Sections of Research Articles in Mechanical Engineering and Applied Linguistics [J]. International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World 5 (2): 346-359.
4. Yang, R., & D. Allison. (2003). Research Articles in Applied Linguistics: Moving from Results to Conclusions [J]. English.for Specific Purposes.
5. Gu, Z. M. (2007). A corpus-based contrastive study of conclusion sections in Chinese and foreign English academic journal articles [Master's thesis]. Huazhong University of Science and Technology.
6. Li, W. C. (2012). A corpus-based genre analysis of conclusion sections in applied linguistics research articles [Master's thesis]. Henan Normal University.
7. Duan, T. T. (2017). A genre comparative analysis of the conclusion sections in Chinese and English linguistic academic papers. Chinese Journal of ESP, (01), 52-62+143.
8. Bitchener, J. (2010). Writing an Applied Linguistics Thesis or Dissertation: A Guide to Presenting Empirical Research. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
9. Kanoksilapatham, B. Distinguishing textual features characterizing structural variation in research articles across three engineering sub - discipline corpora [J].English for Specific Purposes, 2015(37).