A Rhetorical Structural Analysis of Introductions in L2 Saudi Students’ Argumentative Essays

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2023-0093

Abstract

The introduction is a pivotal sub-genre in academic writing because of its rhetorical role in determining whether a written work is necessary and worth reading. A significant body of research has examined the rhetorical structure of introductions in different written text genres, such as research articles and dissertations. However, little research has investigated the rhetorical moves of the introduction in undergraduate students’ academic essays, particularly in the Saudi context. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the rhetorical moves in the introductions of argument essays. Also, the rhetorical strategies (steps) employed to construct each move in the introduction did not receive much attention. Hence, the second purpose of this study is to explore how each move in the introduction was rhetorically constructed. This study analyzed 49 introductions from argument essays written by L2 undergraduate Saudi students at a Saudi university. The textual data was analyzed according to Hyland’s (1990) five moves in the introduction section of his proposed model. The results showed that most students employed Move 1, Move 2, and Move 3 to compose their introductions. It was also found that while Move 4 was not used in several introductions, Move 5 was excluded from all the texts. The study also determined lists of steps to construct Move 1 and Move 2, whereas Move 3 was mostly constructed with the thesis statement (Step 2). The findings of this study have pedagogical and research implications for L2 students’ academic writing.

Keywords: L2 writing, academic essay, introductions move-step structure, rhetorical analysis

1. Introduction

The academic essay is a vital writing genre that requires writers to use appropriate linguistic features and follow specific structural norms that differentiate it from other genres, such as doctoral dissertations, book reviews, and research articles, to achieve communicative purposes (e.g., analyze, review, synthesize, persuade, or report information). The members of the academic discourse community acknowledge these purposes, which gives the genre legitimacy (Bhatia, 2002; Swales, 1990, 2004). In other words, a genre is the common language of a particular discourse community; thus, writers must demonstrate rhetorical familiarity with their discourse community (Hyland, 2007). Generally, the rhetorical structure of an argument essay includes an introduction, an argument composed of a body or several bodies, and a conclusion. The introduction is essential to these
components because of its rhetorical role (Swales, 1990). For example, introductions must attract the readers' interest and orient them to the content of the essay. Brown and Marshall (2012) described introductions as meta-discursive texts that must refer to what the readers already know, what they will discover, and the context in which the essay is situated. Therefore, the writer's skill in properly composing an introduction to entice the reader to read the whole essay is crucial. To achieve this goal, Bhatia (2002) and Swales (1990, 2004) asserted that an introduction must include several written moves following the conventions of the academic writing genre.

In this regard, move analysis, an approach used to determine the rhetorical move structures and the embedded steps within each move, has gained much attention in different disciplines. Indeed, there has been a plethora of research examining the structure of the introduction of second language (L2) writers in various written genres, such as research articles (Djuwari, Saputri, & Author, 2022; Ozturk, 2018) and dissertations or theses (Nguyen & Pramoolsook, 2014; Zainuddin & Shaari, 2017). Another line of inquiry has examined the rhetorical patterns in introductions in spoken genres, such as conference presentations (Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005; Singh, Ali, Chan, & Tan, 2019) and three-minute thesis presentations (Hu & Liu, 2018). This body of research broadened our understanding of how expert L2 writers rhetorically organize introductions. However, to the researcher’s knowledge, there is a general lack of research on analyzing the rhetorical moves of introductions in undergraduate L2 students' texts, particularly in the Saudi context. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to explore the rhetorical structure of the introduction in academic essays composed by L2 undergraduate Saudi students. The study attempts to explore the following questions:

- What rhetorical moves do L2 Saudi students use to construct the introductions of their argument essays?
- What rhetorical strategies do L2 Saudi students use to compose each move in their introductions?

2. Literature Review

Genre is an important concept that becomes an effective framework for examining the rhetorical function of oral and written discourse in different disciplines. Swales (1990) perceived genre as a communicative event characterized by its communicative purpose, style, content, and targeted audience. Likewise, Martin (1992) pointed out that the genre is a goal-driven communicative activity. In this sense, Bhatia (2002) postulated that each genre imposes its own norms and constraints on the use of discoursal resources. As a result of such constraints, each discourse community has its own language characteristics. Hyland (2002) maintained that looking closely at the practices of the discourse of communities will eventually lead us to more specificity since these communities differ in their perspectives on knowledge, modes of inquiry, and conceptions of the world. These differences, indeed, could cause difficulties for readers and writers if they need to become more familiar with the linguistic and semiotic practices of the community. As such, Bhatia (2002) emphasized the importance of individuals' awareness of the appropriate use of the lexico-grammatical conventions associated with the discourse community. Johns (1997) elaborated that knowledge of textual features not only includes the microstructure (i.e., the use of hedging, reporting verbs, and lexical verbs) but also involves the macrostructure of the text. Therefore, when individuals become acquainted with rhetorical structures, they realize how texts are interrelated and how meanings are constructed in relation to complex social systems. Individuals can then claim membership eligibility in their discourse community (Hyland, 2000).

Within the academic writing discourse and adhering to the conceptualization of genre, Swales (1990) maintained that introductions have determined aims and clear structures. Therefore, introductions are eligible to be considered genres in themselves. In addition, Evans, Gruba, and Zobel (2014) and Lipson (2005) regard introductions as independent genres, with the explicit function of providing the scope of the article, and thus convincing readers whether the rest of the text is worth further attention or not. To achieve this purpose, writers need to employ certain rhetorical conventions appropriately, meet the demands of the discourse community, and gain its approval.
2.1 Rhetorical Moves

Broadly speaking, academic texts, including introductions, are constructed of a series of rhetorical moves, which Dudley-Evans (2002) described as obligatory elements to accept a text as an example of the genre. Bhatia (2001) conceptualized moves as "rhetorical instruments that realize a subset of specific communicative purposes associated with a genre." (p. 84). In Holmes' (1997) view, a move is "a segment of text that is shaped and constrained by a specific communicative function" (p. 325). According to Swales (2004), texts are composed of distinct sections; each section is subdivided into moves, and each move can be broken down into multiple text fragments, known as steps, that together achieve the purpose of the move. Ruiying and Allison (2003) explained that while a move highlights the essential function of a section of a text on a broad level, the steps specify the methods used for achieving the move's rhetorical aim. Simply put, moves are text clusters with specific semantic and functional purposes.

Move analysis is a specific type of genre analysis that has become the most common method for examining the rhetorical organization of texts. Biber, Connor, and Upton (2007) pointed out that move analysis is a top-down approach in which the text is divided into moves, and the related steps in each move are noted. The first step in the process of move analysis is to create an analytical framework that involves the types of moves that might occur within the text. The growing interest in examining the rhetorical moves of a particular genre has yielded various analytical frameworks, such as Hyland's (2000), Toulmin's (2003), and Swales' (1990, 2004), to name a few. Although these models vary in the number and type of moves and steps, they all emphasize the importance of adhering to the sequential order of the moves to achieve the writing results generally accepted within the discourse community.

2.2 Hyland's (1990) Model for Rhetorical Moves Analysis

Among the available move analysis frameworks, Hyland's (1990) model has been found useful in exploring the communicative moves in the academic essays written by undergraduate L2 students. For instance, Pramoolsook and Qian (2013) applied Hyland's (1990) model to analyze 200 argumentative essays written by Chinese undergraduate students, both English and non-English majors. The researchers found that most of the essays followed the three stages suggested in Hyland's model. However, the non-English major students added a new move within the Argument stage that was not included in the model, called the contradiction move. Imtiaz and Mahmood (2014) also used Hyland's (1990) model to examine the rhetorical structure of 33 argumentative essays written by Pakistani college students. Like Pramoolsook and Qian (2013), the researchers found that Pakistani students adhered to the three stages suggested in Hyland's model when writing their argumentative essays. Pakistani students also incorporated novel moves that did not appear in the model, namely contradiction and suggestion. While these researchers employed Hyland's model to examine the moves of all the stages of the argumentative essays, Liu (2015), in his comparative study, focused only on the Conclusion stage of Hyland's model. By analyzing 184 Chinese students' conclusions, Liu (2015) found that the rhetorical organization of the conclusions written in English is significantly different from those produced in Chinese. Also, Kanestion and Singh (2021) focused their examination on one stage of Hyland's model, the Argument stage, written by 24 students applying to a university in Malaysia.

Despite the fact that there is a dearth of research examining the introductions composed by L2 undergraduate students in general, this group of students in the Saudi context did not gain much attention. Moreover, the existing research has not examined the rhetorical strategies (steps) that the L2 students use to construct each move in the introductions. In light of this research gap, this study explores the rhetorical moves and steps that L2 undergraduate Saudi students use to compose the introduction section of their argument essays.
3. Methodology

3.1 Context and Sample

This study aims to explore the rhetorical moves and steps in the introduction section of the academic essays written by L2 undergraduate Saudi students. The study took place at a Saudi public university during the fall semester of 2022. The data was obtained from students majoring in English who were enrolled in a required writing course called Academic Writing. This course is offered two days a week for an hour and a half per day. The course requires students to compose three major essays: argumentative, descriptive, and critical review. Considering Hyland’s (1990) model, the students’ argumentative essays have been chosen for this research. Toward the end of the semester and after completing all the course requirements, the researcher explained the study to the students, taking into account the ethical considerations of obtaining informed consent and keeping the essays anonymous.

Patton (2014) pointed out that the purposive sampling method provides a broad understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, the participants of this study were purposefully selected according to the following criteria: enrollment in the Academic Writing course at the time of collecting data, submission of the final draft of the argument essay, and signing of the agreement form for using the essays for research purposes. Among the 51 undergraduate students, the researcher purposefully collected essays from 49 students because one student withdrew from the course and the second student did not sign the agreement form. From this set of 49 argumentative essays, the introductory paragraphs were used as units of analysis while excluding the argument and conclusion paragraphs from the analysis. The selected introductions were saved as raw data and labeled as TS (Thesis Stage) with identified numbers ranging from 01 to 49. For instance, TS_01 refers to the Thesis Stage (introduction) that student number one wrote.

3.2 Analytical Framework

In this study, Hyland’s (1990) framework was followed as a guide to examine the rhetorical structure of the 49 introductions written by L2 undergraduate Saudi students. Hyland’s (1990) framework included three essential stages representing the overall structure of argumentative essays: Thesis, Argument, and Conclusion. Each stage is structured into a series of moves (see Table 1). To achieve the purpose of this study, the Thesis Stage of Hyland’s model, commonly called the introduction in the Saudi context, was used as an analytical lens to examine the rhetorical structure of the 49 introductions written by L2 undergraduate Saudi students. Table 1 below shows the five moves composing the introduction stage. Hyland’s analytical framework was chosen because it offers an in-depth examination of each move, which makes it a suitable model to explain the rhetorical structure of the introduction. In addition, Hyland proved the validity of this model by analyzing 65 essays written in English by L2 students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Move</th>
<th>Move Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Presents background material for topic contextualization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Proposition</td>
<td>Furnishes a specific statement of position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Marker</td>
<td>Introduces and /or identifies a list.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Analysis Procedures

The analysis process started by compiling the introductory paragraphs into a separate Word document. Then, the moves were identified within each introduction, according to Hyland’s move classification in the Thesis Stage, followed by determining the steps used to shape each move in the introductions. Next, the occurrence percentages of each move and step in the introductions were calculated manually. Following Kanoksilapatham (2005), the identified moves were classified based on their frequency of occurrence. In this regard, a move was considered obligatory if it occurred in every introduction (100%), conventional when its frequent appearance was between 99% and 60%, and optional if it was less than 60%.

To ensure the reliability of the identified moves and steps, the researcher and a rater, a university professor experienced in genre analysis, analyzed the data independently. The researcher and rater held several discussion sessions to validate the identified moves and solve any challenges regarding their identification. The cross-checking of the results revealed a high level of inter-rater agreement on move-step structure and identification.

4. Results and Discussion

The results are reported and discussed in two sections. The first presents an analysis of the moves employed in the students’ introductions according to their frequency of occurrence. The second focuses on classifying the rhetorical steps used to construct each move within the introductions.

4.1 The Overall Occurrences of Moves

Overall, the results showed that not all five moves constituting an introduction in Hyland’s (1990) model were employed in the students’ introductions. Also, none of the 49 introductions included novel moves outside Hyland’s proposed model. One salient finding is that regardless of which rhetorical move was excluded, most of the 49 introductions followed the linear rhetorical structure suggested in Hyland’s model. That is, although some introductions were constructed of fewer than five moves, the common structural patterns in these introductions typically start with the Gambit, followed by the Information, Proposition, and Evaluation.

Table 2. Frequency of Moves’ Occurrence in the Introduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moves</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move 2 (Information)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>95.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 3 (Proposition)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>83.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 1 (Gambit)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>71.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 4 (Evaluation)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 5 (Marker)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 2, every introduction except for two included Move 2 (Information), in which 47 (95.9%) of the students contextualized the topic. Similarly, Imtiaz and Mahmood (2014) and Pramoolsook and Qian (2013) found that Move 2 appeared with a high frequency of occurrence in the students’ introductions. This high usage of Move 2 indicates the L2 students’ awareness of the importance of raising the readers’ knowledge about the controversial topic.

The second most prevalent move in introductions is Move 3 (Proposition), as only eight writers still need to state their position on the topic. The students in this study were similar to those in the studies of Imtiaz and Mahmood (2014) and Kanestion, Singh, and Shamsudin (2017), who also used Move 3 more often in their essays. One possible explanation for the increasing usage of this move, as Pramoolsook and Qian (2013) pointed out, is that it is a common in-class practice that students
articulate their stands and provide a list of justifications for their opinions while discussing the topic.

Out of 49 introductions, 35 writers (71.4%) employed Move 1 (Gambit), in which they attempted to capture the readers’ attention. Hyland (1990) argued that this move requires particular skills to impress the readers, and thus it was found in other studies (e.g., Imtiaz & Mahmood, 2014) that this move was rarely used in introductions. In this study, however, the students showed their skills in constructing this move by drawing on broad rhetorical strategies to captivate their audience, as explained in the next section.

Nevertheless, Move 4 (Evaluation) was found in only 22 introductions (44.8%), showing that the students were less concerned about providing evidence to support their proposition. This result was also reported in Pramoolsook and Qian’s (2013) study. A possible reason for students’ rare usage of Move 4 is that providing evidence might be challenging. Furthermore, the students seemed unfamiliar with the conventions of writing the introduction of an argument essay; hence, they maintained their evidence to support their theses in the Argument Stage of their essays.

Regarding Move 5 (Marker), there was a strong tendency among the students to exclude this move from their introductions (0%). Indeed, excluding this move seemed to be a common writing practice among L2 students. For instance, the Pakistani students in Imtiaz and Mahmood’s (2014) study and the Malaysian students in Kanestion et al.’s (2017) study failed to include Move 5 in their introductions. This could be attributed to the fact that the writing textbooks often emphasize the rhetorical structure of the introduction of an argumentative essay as bifurcated into Gambit, Information, and Proposition while ignoring the Evaluation and Marker moves.

According to the frequency of the move occurrences (see Table 2), the L2 Saudi students changed the criteria for some of the moves regarding their priority of use. For example, moves 1 and 2 are optional in Hyland’s framework, but they appeared to be conventional components in the students’ introductions, as they occurred in 71.4% and 95.9% of the introductions, respectively. Also, Hyland (1990) affirmed that Move 3 is compulsory, but L2 Saudi students used it conventionally, as it appeared in 83.6% of the introductions.

### 4.2 Identification of the Rhetorical Steps in the Moves

This section presents the rhetorical strategies (steps) students employed to construct the moves of their introductions. The findings were reported according to the moves’ frequency of occurrence in the introductions of Saudi students. It is important to note that the illustrative examples of the steps in this section were used exactly as the students wrote them, without any modifications.

**Table 3. Distribution of Steps in Each Move in the Introductions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moves</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move 1</td>
<td>S1 Asking a question related to the topic.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 1</td>
<td>S2. Providing a quotation related to the topic.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 1</td>
<td>S3 Providing an anecdote to illustrate a point.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 1</td>
<td>S4 Providing statistics to give factual information about the topic.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 1</td>
<td>S5 Giving a general statement related to the topic.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 2</td>
<td>S1 Defining the key terms.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 2</td>
<td>S2 Providing experts’ opinions.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 2</td>
<td>S3 Classifying the issues related to the topic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 2</td>
<td>S4 Explaining the issues related to the topic.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 2</td>
<td>S5 Presenting the opponents and/or advocates’ debate about the topic.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 2</td>
<td>S6 Providing fallacy.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 3</td>
<td>S1 Stating a position.</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 3</td>
<td>S2 Providing a list of justifications.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 4</td>
<td>S1 Providing a comment supporting their propositions.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>81.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 4</td>
<td>S2 Providing a research evidence to support their propositions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.1 The Information (Move 2).

The analysis revealed that students regarded Move 2 as a vital component of their introductions and used different rhetorical strategies (steps) to construct it. As seen in Table 3, defining the meaning of terms related to the topic (Step 1) was the most preferred strategy, as it occurred in 45% of the 47 introductions. The excerpts below are examples of Step 1.

1. Vegetarian is a person who avoid eating meat or fish for health or moral reasons (TS_01)
2. The vegetarian system is a diet based on eating plant products, in which it refrains from eating animal products (TS_07).

Moreover, 26% of the students invoked experts’ opinions (Step 2) to provide more information about the topic. In this step, the students explicitly referred to experts’ names and their work. The excerpt below is an example of Step 2.

1. “The proportion of vegetarians in the Western world is between 1.5% and 2.5% while in India it is close to 40%” according to the encyclopedia report (2022) (TS_47).

In fact, Malaysian students also used definitions and experts’ opinions (Kanestion et al., 2017). This finding indicated that providing information about the topic is a typical writing practice among L2 students. However, other students in this study presented their perspectives instead of citing experts’ ideas, in which 19% of the students classified the themes related to the topic (Step 3). The following excerpt is an example.

1. There are a lot of types of Vegetarian diet; for instance, “Ovo-lacto vegetarianism” which means you are only able to eat dairy, and eggs aside from vegetables. The second type is “ovo vegetarianism” which means the only thing that you are allowed to eat besides vegetables is eggs. The third is “Lacto vegetarianism” which allows to eat dairy beside vegetables. The last type is “vegan diet” which is the only thing that your diet consists of is vegetables.” (TS_25).

In addition, 17% of the students explained issues related to the topic (Step 4), such as providing historical background. The excerpts below are examples of Step 4.

1. This phenomenon began to spread in the early nineteenth century. It came from ancient India (TS_20)
2. The earliest reliable evidence for vegetarians’ theory was that it was practice in Greece days from the sixth century. As it continued rising from the late 2010s till now (TS_39).

It seemed that the students relied on Steps 3 and/or 4 to show that they had some knowledge about the topic and to add more detail. Another interesting finding is that 14.8% of the students presented both the opponents’ and advocates’ views about the topic (Step 5) to construct Move 2. Further, only two writers (4%) provided a fallacy (Step 6), as they illogically criticized the opponents’ claim. The following excerpts are illustrative samples of Steps 5 and 6, respectively.

1. Many scientists say that becoming vegetarian is something healthy. Others say that meat is something healthy to eat and it provides the body with Protein. There are many different opinions about removing meat from our meals (TS_15)
2. We all know how much meat is an essential element in human life, but those who are vegetarians do not feel the need for it. So they left it, saying that the current meat is manufactured and full of harmful substances that make one dispense with it! (TS_14)

It is also noted that Steps 5 and 6 were never used alone to construct Move 2; rather, they were preceded by one of the steps 1-4. However, including an argument as a rhetorical step to construct Move 2 indicated the students’ unawareness of the writing conventions. Another possible explanation was that the students did not research the topic and instead presented the arguments about the topic that might be discussed in class. It is worth mentioning, however, that while most of the students used a single step to construct Move 2, twelve students (25.5%) relied on more than one step to expand the information about the topic.
4.2.2 The Proposition (Move 3).

Hyland (1990) argued that the proposition is a compulsory move, but it “is not always expressed so succinctly however and may emerge from an informing move” (p. 71). In this study, however, most Saudi students (83.6%) declared their stand on the given issue, either supporting or opposing it. As shown in Table (3), Move 3 was realized through Step 1 because 41 students explicitly expressed their position toward the given topic. The following excerpts illustrate Step 1.

1. I support this diet and wish I could follow it. (TS_18)
2. I think vegetarianism is not the best choice. (TS_19)

It was also noted that only ten students out of the 41 who stated their position (Step 1) without including what is known as a thesis statement (Step 2) employed Move 4 (Evaluation) as a strategy to support their stands on the topic. The absence of the thesis statement from the students’ introduction, as Miller and Pessoa (2016) pointed out, might be influenced by the writing conventions of their first language, Arabic, in which the claims were often stated at the end of the text or sometimes excluded entirely.

However, out of the 41 students who used Move 3, it was found that 31 writers added Step 2 to support their positions with a list of justifications. The following excerpts illustrate how students employed Step 2 in constructing Move 3.

1. There are many advantages to following a vegetarian diet, including protecting the animals, strong body, and saving money (TS_20)
2. Vegetarianism has a negative impact on human mental and physical health. (TS_28)
3. Eating meat has environmental, health, and economic benefits. (TS_33)

The above examples suggest that incorporating the thesis statement might indicate that the 31 students have researched the topic and formed their thesis statement according to the evidence they found. Indeed, the thesis statement is conceived as an essential rhetorical strategy to construct the Proposition Move of an introduction (Miller & Pessoa, 2016). Imtiaz and Mahmood (2014) regarded excluding the proposition from the introduction as the students’ failure to accomplish the task. In this sense, it could be argued that the students in this study who included the thesis statement in their introductions are more likely to be competent writers (Schneer, 2013).

4.2.3 The Gambit (Move 1).

The Gambit Move is the first move in Hyland’s (1990) model. It is known as the hook in the Saudi context, and its primary purpose is to spark the readers’ attention rather than provide information about the topic. As shown in Table 3, almost half of the 35 students who used Move 1 preferred asking a question (Step 1) to draw the readers’ attention. The excerpts below are examples.

1. Are vegetarians healthier than meat eaters? (TS_21)
2. What happens if all humans become “Vegetarians”? (TS_30)

Most students considered asking questions an effective strategy to build rapport with the readers. Another step that appeared in 27.7% of the introductions was quoting experts’ opinions (Step 2) to entice the readers, such as the following excerpt.

1. Einstein (1957) once said, “Nothing will benefit human health and increase chances for survival of life on Earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet.” (TS_24)

As shown in Table 3, the last three steps were the least frequently used in the introductions, in which only three students (8%) attracted the readers’ attention by providing anecdotes (Step 3), two students (6%) added statistics (Step 4), and two writers (6%) gave a general statement (Step 5). Examples of steps 3, 4, and 5 are given below, respectively.

1. A long time ago, a relative of mine had gout because he ate a lot of meat. Since that time, he decided to become a vegetarian (TS_38)
2. There are an estimated 1.5 billion vegetarians worldwide, and they constitute 22% of the people in this world, according to the report of the Deals On Health (2022) (TS_29).
3. Your choice of diet could be a double-edged sword that either risks your life or makes your health better. (TS_41)

One possible reason for employing Steps 3, 4, and 5 was the writers’ awareness of the importance of adding a dramatic touch to engage the reader.

4.2.4 Evaluation (Move 4).

As Hyland (1990) pointed out, writers present their assessment of a particular claim to construct Move 4. In this study, 22 students used two steps to evaluate their thesis statements. Step 1 was the preferred rhetorical strategy for constructing Move 4, where 18 students wrote comments reflecting their perspectives to evaluate the topic. The following excerpts are examples.

1. Vegetarians have more negatives because of their lack of the essential nutrients that only can be obtained in animal products. (TS_41)
2. Being a vegetarian is important for several reasons, such as protecting from cancer (TS_17).

It is important to mention that among those 18 students, only ten excluded the thesis statement and used Step 1, which might be understood as compensation for the absence of the thesis statement. Regarding Step 2, only four students (18%) used it by providing evidence from research to support their thesis statement, as shown in the following excerpts.

1. Studies say that vegetarians are 18 percent more likely to develop mental health. (TS_46)
2. There are several studies conducted on a vegetarian diet and its relationship to mental health. (TS_28)

The students who included Step 2 in Move 4 could be seen as advanced writers because the textbooks never instruct students to include Move 4 in their introductions. However, it could be concluded that most of the rhetorical strategies used are found within the moves that Saudi students deemed most important.

5. Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the rhetorical move-step structure of the introduction (Thesis Stage) in argumentative essays written by L2 undergraduate Saudi students. Hyland’s (1990) model was used as a framework for analyzing the data (49 introductions). Regarding the rhetorical moves, the study found that not all the moves constituting an introduction, as suggested in Hyland’s (1990) model, appeared in the students’ introductions. In other words, while there was a general tendency among the students to exclude Move 5 from their introductions completely, the other moves appeared with varying degrees of use. As a result, most students introduced their essays with a three-move rhetorical structure (Move 1, Move 2, and Move 3), and a few had a four-move structure by including Move 4. The students’ rhetorical decision to use the first three moves in Hyland’s (1990) model could be seen as an influence of their English writing instruction, which often relies on textbooks emphasizing these three moves as the rhetorical structure of the introduction.

A closer examination of the rhetorical steps revealed that the frequency of the move’s occurrence was somewhat correlated with the number of steps used to construct it. Move 2 was the most used move across the introductions and was constructed in six steps, while Move 4 was accomplished in two steps as it was rarely used. The study found that most students employed one step to construct each move. Basically, defining the key terms was the most preferred step among students to contextualize the topic with background information (Move 2), while asking a question was the most prioritized step to attract the readers’ attention (Move 1). Furthermore, most students articulate their positions on the topic (Move 3) using the thesis statement as a rhetorical strategy.

Based on the findings of this study, some pedagogical implications for writing are suggested. First, Hyland’s (1990) model could be used as a guideline to instruct undergraduate students on how to write a well-organized introduction to an argument essay. This model depicts the sequence of the
five major moves that assist L2 students in writing and raise their awareness of the conventions of academic community discourse. Part of this rhetorical awareness should be devoted to the strategies used to construct the moves, which could be provided through explicit discussion and activities. Moreover, instructors should develop clear criteria for assessment and feedback that might be compatible with Hyland’s (1990) model to provide the students with the necessary knowledge of the genre and, as a consequence, enhance their writing skills.

Nevertheless, the current study has some limitations that need to be addressed to guide future research. First, the number of introductions examined in this study was relatively small; thus, the findings may not be suitable for generalizing to a larger group. In this sense, future research needs to explore a large number of introductions written by Saudi students to determine whether or not the results are consistent with a larger population. Furthermore, this study focused on the introduction section of the argument essay; therefore, further research needs to scrutinize the overall rhetorical structure of the Saudi students’ argument essays. This could provide insights into the organizational challenges that Saudi students might encounter. In addition, this study is concerned with analyzing the rhetorical move-step structure of the introductions. It would be interesting if future research looked at the linguistic resources Saudi students use to construct the rhetorical moves and steps of their introductions or whole essays.

References


