

# A Genre Analysis of Persian Research Article Abstracts: Communicative Moves and Author Identity

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## Abstract

Most studies within the area of genre analysis, particularly those conducted in Iran, have exclusively used text analysis. While such investigations have led to important understandings of generic features of texts, it can be argued that incorporating interview data for triangulation can lead to better understanding of generic features of texts. Along this line, this paper reports the results of a qualitative study of Persian RA abstracts written by native speakers of Persian. Taking a macro and a micro structure framework, this article will look into the 'moves' and 'author identity' in such RA abstracts. Two patterns are often associated with English academic prose: *Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion* and CARS (Create-a-research-space) (Lopes, 2004). This, however, did not seem to be the case in most RA abstracts under study. The other feature of Persian RA abstracts to be explored is the absence of first person pronoun. One preliminary hypothesis would be to attribute this to a carry-over of positivistic traditions (Hyland, 2001), though qualitative interviews pointed to a close link between lack of reference to self and modesty as a cultural norm among the participants under study.

**Keywords:** Genre Analysis; Moves Analysis; RA Abstracts; Qualitative Research

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## **1. Introduction**

Academic writing in general and writing research articles in particular are among the most important crafts members of an academic community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) should acquire if they want to get published. The need is more pressing for ‘periphery scholars’ (Canagarajah, 1996) who wish to publish the results of their research in English medium international journals, present in international conferences, and acquire academic tenure. This is particularly true of Iranian scholars who are largely underrepresented in international journals. Our main aim in this paper is to explore how Iranian periphery scholars might fall behind in their endeavour to get published. We argue that in order to investigate this issue, we first need to study how these scholars organize their research papers written in their first language, i.e., Persian. This task is achieved through two types of analysis of RA abstracts written in Persian by these scholars. The first will be moves analysis of research papers in different disciplines. This analysis is important because rhetorical structures are not the same across different languages (Kaplan, 1966, 1987; Connor, 1987, 1996), and Iranian scholars who are quite proficient writers in their first language might find it difficult to organise their writing using the ‘preferred’ rhetorical structure in English. Our second analysis which will take a micro-analytic framework, considers the procedure used in the papers under study to represent the authors through using first person pronouns. This is motivated by the fact that author realization in a research paper is influenced not only by one’s native language and culture, but also by different epistemological orientations of disciplines (Hyland, 2001).

Therefore, it might be interesting to see how Iranian authors present themselves in their writing. In addition to the above analyses of RA abstracts, we also conducted several interviews with authors to see how they conceive of

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writing an abstract. We also hope to argue that Iranian scholars' failure to publish internationally, as our limited data indicates, is partly due to their different conceptions of writing. Our analysis, though, is not exhaustive and our approach should best be regarded as a case study, which we hope, will help us "to establish theoretically valid connections between events and phenomena which previously were ineluctable" (Mitchell, 1984, p. 239). In other words, the main objective of this paper is to look into the ways the abstract section of academic papers of a group of Persian native speakers is constructed. The selection of abstract section of research articles is motivated by the observation that it has a significant impact on whether research papers are accepted in conferences or by refereed journals published in English, and finally if they get read by colleagues (Swales, 1990, p. 179; Lores, 2004, p. 281).

The present work can be situated within genre studies which were underlined by the seminal work of John Swales (1990): *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. In this work Swales approached the analysis of research papers in a macro analytic framework and identified certain 'moves' in research papers. The main feature of Swales' work was that he based his analysis on the "communicative purpose" (Yang & Allison, 2004, p. 266) or 'move', which is a "functional term... [referring] to a defined and bounded communicative act that is designed to contribute to one main communicative objective, that of the whole text." (Lores, 2004, p. 282).

Taking a macro structure framework, Swales (1990) identified a moves-steps model in the introduction section of research articles, which he called the CARS (Create a Research Space) model, consisting of 'establishing a territory, establishing a niche, and occupying a niche', as the main moves. Each of these moves was further divided into smaller rhetorical functions which Swales referred to as steps.

Because of its potential pedagogic appeal, moves analysis has attracted a lot of attention and culminated in many studies focussing on various aspects of research articles. Many scholars have looked into variations of RAs across discipline (Holmes, 1997; Santos, 2002; Yang & Allison, 2004), while others have analysed different sections of research articles (Hyland, 1999).

The literature on different sections of research articles is rapidly growing. Lores (2004) identifies two main approaches within ESP genre analysis studies: “one group of studies is on the structure of research articles (RAs), dissertations and other professional writing,” (p. 256) which is often referred to as macro structure framework, and ..., “the other is on particular features of RAs, such as the use of hedging, modality, and reporting verbs” (p. 265), categorised as the micro structure framework.

Lores (2004) studied 36 abstracts taken from three prestigious journals in linguistics. About 61% of the abstracts showed an IMRD pattern, which Lores identified with the informative type of abstracts, encapsulating the whole research article. About 30% of the abstracts showed the CARS pattern, comparable to the indicative type of abstracts. This type of abstract did not mirror the structure of the whole paper, “but of introduction section in RAs” (p. 284). At a further level of analysis, he investigated the thematic progression of the abstracts in his corpus. Following Danes’ (1974) categorisation of TP (Thematic Progression) patterns, he identified two such patterns, namely single linear TP and TP with a constant Theme. In the former the theme of the first sentence becomes the rheme of the second sentence, while in the latter the same theme is observed in a chain of sentences (Lores, 2004, p. 288). He found that the use of thematic progression patterns did not seem to be random, but each move in the rhetorical structure tended to co-occur with a certain type of

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TP pattern. For instance, he observed that it was more probable to find a linear TP pattern for Move 1, and a constant TP pattern for Moves 2 and 3.

In another study, Melander *et al.* (1997) investigated the influence of academic field and national language on the organization of abstracts. Their main concern was to investigate whether national or disciplinary proclivities were more important in the rhetorical and linguistic organisation of abstracts.

While highlighting the importance of abstracts in academia, they analysed abstracts written by Americans in English, by Swedes in English and by Swedes in Swedish. Their corpus consisted of 10 abstracts in each category in biology, medicine and linguistics, totalling 90 abstracts on the whole. They concluded that the field had a greater impact on the organization of abstracts, though “within linguistics there appear to be strong national or cultural difference, within biology remarkable homogeneity, and within medicine a rather uncertain picture.” (p. 267).

A modified version of Swales' (1990) CARS model was introduced by Samraj (2002), based on the analysis of 24 RAs published in conservation biology and wild life behaviour. The main modification was taking “reference to previous research” out of Move 1 and putting it in Move 2 of the original Swalesian model. Samraj observed that:

... reference to previous literature is not an element that is just found in Move 1. It can play a prominent role in Move 2, when it is used to support gaps in previous research. Instead of a cyclical pattern of literature review followed by a gap, the literature review can be subsumed under the rhetorical function of gap indication because previous research is drawn on by authors to justify the gap being created (p. 15).

In a later work Samraj (2005) compared introductions and abstracts in research articles from two related disciplines, conservation biology and wild life behaviour. She randomly selected 12 RAs from each of two leading journals in these two disciplines, working on the first 12 articles in each journal, totalling 48 texts. Using the models proposed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), she analyzed the abstracts and introductions and compared their similarity. She concluded that contrary to findings in previous studies, the abstract and introduction sections might not always show distinctive communicative purpose and rhetorical structure. She also found parallels in the existence of certain rhetorical moves in genre sets in the same discipline. For instance, while centrality claims were prominent in both abstracts and introductions in conservation biology articles, they were relatively less prevalent in articles in wild life behaviour.

Based on Swales' concept of move analysis, Connor and Mauranen (1999) analysed 34 grant proposals from European Union research grant proposals in order to describe linguistic and rhetorical features of such applications written in English by Finnish scientists in science and technology. They identified 10 different moves in their sample of proposals, some of which were similar to moves found in other academic texts. However, they found four moves specific to grant proposals, namely *achievements*, *benefits*, *importance*, and *compliance*. *Achievements* are "prospective results of the project" (p. 57), or results, findings or outcomes which are anticipated as a result of conducting the project. The *Benefits* move highlights the usefulness of the projected results of the study with regard to "their value to the outside world, the study itself, or the domain of the research in itself" (p. 57). The *importance* move underscores the proposal being important and urgently needed in the real world or the research

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field. The *compliance* move, specific to the European Union, specifies the relevance of the proposal to EU objectives.

Holmes (1997) studied discussion sections of 30 RAs from three social science disciplines: history, political science and sociology. He found certain similarities in the moves in these three disciplines with comparable sections of natural science RAs, though there were also some discernable differences. Of the three disciplines, history texts bore the least resemblance to natural sciences with regard to the moves used in RA discussion sections.

Hyland (2004) studied 20 MA and 20 PhD dissertations from each of six academic disciplines in Hong Kong, comprising 240 texts. The acknowledgement sections were analysed based on their functional moves. In addition, interview data was collected from 2 MA and 2 PhD students in each discipline. He found a “three tier structure consisting of a main thanking move framed by optional Reflecting and Announcing moves” (p. 308) in his corpus. Each move was further divided into sub-units or steps.

The first move Hyland identified in his corpus was the Reflecting Move, in which students comment on the process of writing their dissertations and what they have learned in the process. The second move, the Thanking Move, was the only move present in all texts, and it comprised 90% of all steps in the corpus. This move consisted of four steps as follows: (1) presenting participants; (2) thanking for academic assistance; (3) thanking for providing resources; (4) thanking for moral support. The third move, the Announcing Move, was present in only 11% of the texts, and it included two moves: (1) accepting responsibility; (2) dedicating the thesis.

In a recent study on the macro-structure approaches to RA studies, Pho (2008) studied 30 abstracts of data based articles from three journals in applied linguistics and educational technology for their rhetorical moves and the

linguistic realizations of these moves. An important finding of this work was that though there seemed to be some differences in the macro structures of abstracts in the corpus, the linguistic realization of the moves were quite similar across the disciplines and journals under investigation.

Tang and John (1999) are among researchers who take a micro structural approach to genre analysis of research articles. They focused on the use of first person pronouns in a corpus of 27 academic essays written by first year undergraduates at a university in Singapore. They set up a typology of six different writer roles, ranging from “no use of ‘I’” realizing the least powerful writer presence, to “*I as originator*” as the most powerful authorial presence.

This taxonomy was based on Ivanič's (1998) reference to various types of 'I's in academic writing. Basing their arguments on the frequency of each of their six categories in the corpus, the most frequent type of identity they found was *I as representative* and *I as guide*, while the least frequent type was *recounter of research process*. They attributed the large frequency of *representativeness*, categorised by them as the least powerful authorial presence, to the 'weakness' of student writers to bring out their identity, though the mere categorisation of representativeness as the least powerful authorial presence is questionable. This does not seem to be a justified claim as they have not compared their results with a corpus of essays written by expert writers.

Harwood (2005) compared the methodological use of first person pronouns in a corpus of 62000 words of native speaker postgraduate reports and another corpus of 88000 words of research articles in prestigious journals.

Both corpora were taken from computing science. His objective was to compare the use of methodological “I” in novice and expert texts. His frequency analyses showed that the novice participants used a far greater number of methodological “I”s. In addition, while Tang and John (1999) had



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categorised such author presence as “recounter of the research process”, Harwood showed that expert and novice writers used the methodological “I” for different communicative purposes. For instance, expert writers often used “I” to highlight their competence as researchers or to show the uniqueness of their methodological framework. The novice writers, on the other hand, used the methodological “I” to promote themselves as tenacious neophytes who were highly motivated and committed to finish their projects under tight deadlines.

Hyland (2001) in a related study identified certain functions of the first person pronoun in RAs in the so called soft sciences, and showed that though research writing manuals often advise novice members of disciplinary groups to avoid reference to themselves, there are often numerous references to the writer of the RA. However, there are certain norms within each academic tradition which should be taken into account when referring to oneself. One reason for avoiding reference to self is epistemological, in that writers want to state that they are *objective* reporters of the results of the experiments they have conducted, and it would have made no difference to the findings had the researcher been somebody else.

In another study, while emphasising the importance of representing the self in using the first person pronoun in academic writing, Hyland (2002) compared a corpus of writing by undergraduate students in a Hong Kong university with one of research papers by experts. He found that the novice writers often avoided using such pronouns in contexts which involved making arguments or claims. In the interview data he collected from supervisors and students, he found that the individualistic identity implied by using the first person pronoun was often problematic for these students.

In another work on the microanalysis of research articles, Kuo (1999) studied 36 research papers from three journals from computer science, electronic engineering and physics. He wanted to know how the lexicogrammatical choice of pronouns helps writers construct their roles in their texts. They found that the first person plural pronoun was far greater used than other pronouns, having two main semantic references: *exclusive we* which refers to the writer(s) themselves, and *inclusive we* which could refer to the writers and readers, writers and other researchers, or the discipline as a whole.

These semantic references often served different discourse functions. Most instances of *exclusive we* refer to how writers conducted their research, while the *inclusive we* often served the discourse function of “assuming shared knowledge, goals and beliefs” (p. 136).

Along with growing interest in this area in Anglophone and European contexts, Iranian scholars have started to investigate generic features of texts both at macro (Fallahi Moghimi and Mobasher, 2007; Keshavarz and Atai; 2007) and micro levels of analysis (Jalilifar, 2007; Atai and Sadr, 2008). Taking a macro analytic approach, Keshavarz and Atai (2007) compared the generic structure of introduction sections of research articles written by Iranian and non-Iranian writers in applied linguistics. Basing their analysis on Swales' (1990) CARS (Create a Research Space) model, they found no significant difference between the two groups of writers regarding Move 1 (Establishing a Territory) and Move 2 (Establishing a Niche). However, they found a statistically significant difference regarding the use of Move 3 (Occupying the Niche) and the order of moves. They ascribed this finding to “insufficient awareness of many Iranian researchers regarding the importance of Move 3 and order of moves” (p. 14). In another study with a micro level orientation, Atai and Sadr (2008) found significant differences between type, distribution

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and frequency of hedging devices in discussion sections of applied linguistics research articles written by English and Persian native speakers. For instance, English native speakers in their corpus used full verbs, adverbs, modalities and questions more frequently than Persian native speakers.

While such comparative studies have certainly made us realize important generic features of academic texts written by Iranian scholars in English, this paper will further contribute to this line of research by focusing on Iranian scholars writing in Persian. In addition, by incorporating qualitative data in the analysis, we can come to a better understanding of academic writing practices of such scholars.

## **2. Method**

In this section of the paper we will first outline the methodological framework and then elaborate on the two main findings, namely, *author visibility* and *communicative moves* in RA abstracts written by a group of the academic members of staff in Iranian universities.

We would categorise the overall methodology of this study as a constructivist version of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; 2005). This version of grounded theory has been a reaction to criticisms of earlier versions of the theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in that it relied on an external reality in the world. A constructivist version of grounded theory, instead, is based on the position that reality is constructed as a result of the interaction between the researcher and the data. This later version of grounded theory, like its predecessors, still emphasizes a systematic and rigorous approach to research.

This involves the simultaneous collection and analysis of data, a process of open thematic coding followed by categorisation and integration of categories, and a gradual focusing of the research project. The strong point about this

methodological framework is that it often starts with broad conceptualisations and frameworks and as data is collected, the main focus of the study is determined. For instance, through initial analyses of some of the texts written by the participants under study, we had concluded that they often avoided direct reference to themselves in their writings because of a carryover of positivistic orientations towards research and inquiry. In a follow up interview, we came to know that this is done out of modesty as a cultural norm in the Iranian society in general and in academic circles in particular. Yet in a further interview to probe into this issue, one interviewee referred to this as a mitigating strategic tactic. We do not aim to unpack these issues in this section, as we will be discussing these in the next section. This was only meant to show how a grounded framework can help us look into academic writing as a social practice.

The procedures followed in this study can be categorised into two main sections. The first step in this procedure, moves analysis, was carried out on a total of 35 RA abstracts written in Persian by Iranian academic members of staff in four disciplines of Linguistics, Persian Literature, Chemical Engineering, and Power Engineering. The first two disciplines can be grouped in the social *sciences/humanities*, and the remaining two can be categorised as *engineering*. Though this selection of abstracts does not generalise different academic fields, it can cautiously be taken as two representative cases reflecting different epistemological orientations. The following chart shows the number of RA abstracts analysed in each discipline:

**Table 1: Number of RA abstracts analysed in each discipline**

Discipline	Number of RA abstract studied
Linguistics	6
Persian Language and Literature	12
Chemical Engineering	7
Power Engineering	10

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We also studied the use of first person pronouns in the abstracts under study, and in order to validate our findings, we triangulated the results through five interviews with the writers of some of the papers, as follows: an interview with an author in chemical engineering and another with an author in mechanical engineering, and three interviews with three authors of the Persian literature abstracts. We could not organise interviews with authors from linguistics.

In the next section, we will particularly focus on two important issues of this study; namely the communicative moves of these research articles and the realisations of the author in the texts, which are based on textual analyses of the RA abstracts and interviews with the writers of the same texts. As we have already pointed out, this is only a report on a small scale research and the results are by no means conclusive. In this paper, we will present the English translation of the abstracts under study.

## **3. Results**

As we have already suggested, we have taken both a macro and a micro structural approach with regard to RA abstracts under study. In section 3.1 below, we will outline the macro-structural findings regarding functional moves in the four disciplines as explained in the previous section. This will be followed by a focus on one area of micro-structural analysis, namely author identity, in section 3.2.

### **3.1. Communicative Moves in RA Abstracts under Study**

As mentioned in section 1, moves analysis is an approach to analysing texts at macro-level frameworks. In other words, in moves analysis we try to probe into

the communicative intentions of the writers. This means, our unit of analysis is not sentences or paragraphs, but the communicative intentions of writers behind any stretch of discourse. Previous research (Lores, 2004) has shown two types of communicative moves in RA abstract in English: the IMRD (Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion) and the CARS (Create a Research Space: Establishing a territory-Establishing a niche-Occupying a niche).

According to Lores (2004), the former corresponds to the *informative* and the latter to the *indicative* type of RA abstracts. The IMRD model is a miniature image of the whole RA, while the CARS model mirrors the Introduction section in RAs (Lores, 2004, p. 284). In what follows, we will elaborate on our findings regarding communicative moves in each set of Persian RA abstract in the four disciplines under study.

We looked at six abstracts in the field of linguistics. One of the RAs in this discipline did not have any abstract at all. One of the other RAs had a single-move abstract which was more like an extended introduction. The following is a translation of the first few sentences of this abstract:

EXAMPLE 1 (Linguistics):

In this article, the structure of the nucleus of the verb group in standard Persian will be studied. ...Verb is the most important issue in the morphological system of a language. This is because it is the most important part of the sentence which includes the basic meanings of the sentence...

The third abstract had only two moves, purpose *and method*:

EXAMPLE 2 (Linguistics):

**[Purpose]** In this pieces of writing, it will be attempted to identify the reasons or reasons for the death of metaphor .... **[Method]** To achieve this aim, definitions of metaphor as offered by researchers will be

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presented. Then an attempt will be made to explain the process of metaphor making as well as the differences between a dead and an alive metaphor.

From among the rest of the articles, one had a clearly CARS pattern and one had an IMRD pattern, though the latter lacked a reference to Method.

Among the 12 abstracts in the field of the Persian Language and Literature, four had a CARS pattern. A translation of one of these is presented below:

EXAMPLE 3 (Persian Language and Literature):

**[Establishing a territory]** The introduction to Sa'adi's *Golestan* starts with the following verses:

During this era when we were having a good time  
Six hundred and fifty six years had passed from the Hejrat  
My intention was to offer advice, which we did  
And we ask god to bless you. Farewell

**[Establishing a niche]** Almost all experts have suggested that Sa'adi had written these to specify the date of writing of this work, and some have criticised Sa'adi's "having a good time", as this was also the time when the Moguls attacked Baghdad and overthrew the Abbasid Dynasty.

**[Occupying the niche]** The writer believes that these verses are interestingly mysterious, and an attempt will be made to unpack this mystery, so as to answer those who have criticised Sa'adi on this ground.

The rest of the articles did not follow any of the IMRD or CARS models and showed a range of different patterns. One pattern was a two-move structure consisting of an *Introduction* and *Purpose*, and another pattern included *Purpose* and a *didactic conclusion*. An example of the latter is presented below:

EXAMPLE 4 (Persian Language and Literature):

**[Purpose]** This article will study the structure of the following line of poetry which is among the difficult pieces by Hafez: ....

**[Didactic conclusion]** Yes, to achieve this aim, one should pay a higher price, which is to abandon hypocrisy ....

One of the abstracts in this group was more like an extended introduction, as shown below:

EXAMPLE 5 (Persian Language and Literature):

Throughout history, Iran has often been exposed to various foreign artistic traditions as a result of immigration from other countries, conquests and defeats. These traditions have often merged with local traditions, though they have not decreased their purity. On the contrary, the Iranian art has made use of these incoming artistic traditions and gained international recognition.

During the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, Iran's relations with China added vigour to the Iranian arts. For instance, the Rey Pottery and Iranian textile became more delicate, and using traditional means, architects produced masterpieces. The Great Mosque of Isfahan, built in this period, is one of the great masterpieces of this period.

It is interesting to note that the Mongol conquest and the consequent destruction of Iranian cities, did not damage the Iranian arts. On the contrary, it led to better relations between Iran and China, which was followed by the flow of some Chinese artists into Iran, who brought with them the traditional arts of that country. Iranian artists capitalised on this and, merging Chinese artistic traditions with their own, expanded the Iranian arts. Iranian calligraphers modelled the Chinese



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square stamps and developed a variety of the Koofi Calligraphy which was used in inscriptions up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Hoolaku and his successors promoted the art of illumination and familiarised the Iranian artists with the Far East tradition of paintings. This was how the Iranian painters were acquainted with new issues and approaches in painting.

In general, in the linguistics and Persian literature abstracts comprising the soft sciences in this study, only 6 of the 18 abstracts followed either a CARS or an IMRD pattern, i.e. 33 percent could be regarded as rhetorically congruent with the rhetorical tradition for abstract writing in English.

In the field of power engineering 10 abstracts were analysed. From among these only one showed a CARS model. Four included a move which we refer to as an *overview* of the whole paper, as shown below:

EXAMPLE 6 (Power Engineering):

**[Overview]** This article is a detailed report on procedures for designing, modelling, and making efficient of a new structure to make light wave carriers. ...

Another example of such single move abstracts is as follows:

EXAMPLE 7 (Power Engineering):

**[Overview]** In this article a volt light system is presented. In this system a 70w/ 12 v. sodium vapour bulb is used. ... Then the function of this bulb with that of an electronic ballast will be compared.

In chemical engineering, 7 abstracts were analysed, one of which showed an IMRD pattern, while the rest contained two moves: method and discussion. The following is an example of such two-move abstracts in chemical engineering:

EXAMPLE 8 (Chemical Engineering):

**[Method]** In this paper, the spectral transmittance of different solutions of different dyes in water are reconstructed by their colormetric data measured by scanner. Different solutions were prepared and their RGB data were measured by scanner. Then, by using principle component analysis technique, the eigenvectors and eigenvalues of different sets of solutions were calculated, using RGB data and a linear modelling. Finally, the transmission behaviour of each solution is predicted by using the basis function and the RGB values of desired solutions. **[Discussion]** Although the results depend on the sampling technique, but [sic.] very successful reconstructions are observed, totally.

Two of the abstracts, showed a single move categorised as an overview of the whole paper, similar to four of the abstracts in power engineering:

EXAMPLE 9 (Chemical Engineering):

**[Overview]** Electrochemical production of MnO<sub>2</sub> from pyrolusite has been investigated. In contrast to the conventional method, the reduction of pyrolusite to MnO and then acid leaching of Mn(II) is carried out directly in one step using Fe<sup>2+</sup> as a reducing agent in sulphuric acid medium. This method was named reductive leaching. ...

In sum, out of the 17 abstracts in power engineering and chemical engineering in our cohort of hard sciences, only 3 followed either a CARS or an IMRD rhetorical structure, i.e. less than 18 percent. This is almost 50% less than the abstracts in the soft sciences. Though we need to emphasize that given the small number of texts studied we cannot generalize, and assuming that one should expect a greater number of CARS/IMRD patterns, we can cautiously argue that discipline does not have an important influence on the rhetorical

patterns of abstracts in Persian. This is different from Martin's (2003) finding of a comparison of RA abstracts written in English and Spanish by Spanish social scientists, in which he observed a greater degree of similarity between the two sets of abstracts. This is understandable as there seems to be more academic connections between Spanish and English academics. In the next section of the paper, we will deal with a micro element of the abstracts under study, namely, author realization.

### **3.2. Author Identity in RA Abstracts under Study**

The realisation of author identity in academic prose has often been discussed in the literature at both textual and epistemological levels. It is often taken for granted that the way authors refer to themselves is not simply a matter of personal taste, but it is actually textual realisations of epistemological orientations. For instance, the positivistic epistemology, with its adherence to objectivity, tries to avoid any reference to the researcher in the reports of research projects, due to the positivistic belief in the scientific method. In other words, positivists believe that any research study based on the principles of the scientific method and objectivity would lead to the same results regardless of who carries out the research. The following quotation by Einstein (1934, p. 113) is telling in this regard: "when a man is talking about scientific subjects, the little word 'I' should play no part in his expositions".

We developed an interest in this area when some colleagues in a Persian Department asked one of us to translate their Persian RA abstracts into English, a requirement by many Iranian journals. As we had some background in the practice of academic writing, we observed two issues which have made up the bulk of the arguments in this work. The first issue we observed was lack of reference to the writer as the creator of the text. Our second observation was

that the abstract moves often seemed incongruent with the overall communicative moves often referred to in the English tradition of academic writing. The latter was dealt with in the previous sections, and the former will be dealt with below.

As we have already pointed out, there was no direct reference to the writer, as is clear from the following RA abstract:

Example 10 (Persian Language and Literature):

Our country, Iran, has had ups and downs throughout history, among which we can refer to Teimoor's invasion and the subsequent rule of the Teimoorian Dynasty. The Teimoorian ran the country for over a century, and there were profound social, cultural, linguistic, and literary developments during this era.

From among the linguistic and literary developments, we can refer to the linguistic and stylistic developments in the historical texts in this period. In this paper, the author will try to looking into the causes, as well as the linguistic and stylistic developments during the Teimoorian period.

Our first hypothesis was to relate this to the influence of positivistic tradition discussed above. This was why we arranged some interviews with the writers of the abstracts. The schedule for these interviews were mainly based on our earlier analyses of the texts, though the interviews were semi-structured (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p. 146) so that we could pursue themes brought up in the course of the interviews.

As is clear in the following quotations, our initial hunch about the reason for lack of reference to self proved to be wrong. This was rather related to *modesty*, and *eradication of the self* as cultural norms in the Iranian culture in

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general, and in the Iranian academia in particular, as evident from the following interview extracts:

This is probably related to “*maniyat*”,..., anyway there’s been a tradition among the *Orafa* to fight the self. (Author of a Persian Literature abstract)

I don’t like it when a person refers to himself in a text, though it might be a matter of personal taste ... (Author of a chemical engineering abstract)

This brings to mind a degree of “*annaniyat*” or taking an interest in oneself ... (Author of a Persian Literature abstract)

A further interview yet revealed more interesting reasons for non-reference to self in RA abstracts. But before attending to this, we should elaborate on the concept of hedging in academic writing. Hedging in common usage means to avoid giving direct answer to a question. In academic writing, it refers to linguistic means to mitigate the certainty of a claim. Hyland (1996, p. 251) defines hedging as follows:

Hedging refers to linguistic strategies that qualify categorical commitment to express possibility rather than certainty. In scientific writing, hedging is central to effective argument. Hedging is a rhetorical means of gaining reader acceptance of claims, allowing writers to convey their attitude to the truth of their statements and to anticipate possible objections.

Among instances of hedging, we can refer to “it seems”, often used to decrease the degree of certainty of claims. Hyland (1997) argues that hedged claims in scientific articles are directly related to three aspects of the epistemological and social culture of scientific communities, namely,

empiricism, collegiality, and competitiveness. Empiricism assumes that “there is a world independent of language which can be described, more or less faithfully, by linguistic expressions.” (Hyland, 1997, p. 24).

The second feature of scientific communities is collegiality: “In addition to norms for transforming research findings into accredited knowledge, academic cultures also provide rules of conduct which govern the ways in which scientists are expected to behave to one another” (Hyland, 1997, p. 25). The third feature of scientific culture reflected in hedging is competitiveness:

Competitiveness, and its kinship with conflict and rivalry, may initially seem inimical to the scientific spirit of communal and disinterested inquiry, but competition has been a feature of academic life at least since the Greeks and was common in the Medieval universities of Europe ... While there appears to be no research which supports its truth, the dictum ‘publish or perish’ serves to motivate many academics and is recognised by even senior members of the scientific establishment, ... (Hyland, 1997, pp. 27-28).

Going back to the data, in an interview with one of the participants, the interviewee indicated that non-reference to self in RA abstracts was a strategy to avoid possible attacks by editors. He stated that it was always possible that some literature goes unnoticed by an author, and as a result, a claim might prove to have been already made by previous authors. This is, we believe, a form of hedging, which we refer to as *covert hedging*. In the traditional use of the term *hedging*, certain linguistic modifiers are *overtly* used to mitigate the force of the claims made by the researcher. However, as we have already pointed out, the interviewee used non-reference to the writer as a means to mitigate the claims he was making, which is obvious in the following RA abstract:

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Example 11 (Persian Language and Literature):

Paradox is not only a literary device and a poetic image, but it is also a logical, philosophical, and ideological concept. This literary device has been in great use in the Sufis' language, and it has also been used in the Persian poetry from the very beginning. In our literary and rhetorical works, it has often erroneously been taken as *contradiction*, or has been simply ignored altogether. In western works, especially literary dictionaries, it has been extensively discussed, though it has been ignored even in our recent rhetorical works, and definitions offered for it are often contested.

Any attempt to classify different types of paradox should attend to scientific and exact functions of this device in the language of the Sufia, in the old and modern poetry and prose, and in the colloquial language of the man on the street. This paper is an attempt to unpack these issues.

In sum, non-reference to the writer in the RA abstracts under study was not due to positivistic values of objectivity, but was mainly caused by modesty as a cultural norm. It was also used as a type of covert hedging to avoid possible attacks by journal editors.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper we have outlined the results of a grounded theory research on RA abstracts written in Persian. It seems that the RA abstracts under study do not totally conform to the communicative moves in the English tradition of RA abstracts, namely the IMRD and the CARS. Some abstracts had a single move very much like a funnel-like introduction, starting with a very general topic and

ending in a much narrower one. This inconsistency of the type and number of moves in the RA abstracts under study seemed to be common in both the so called soft and hard sciences. For instance, single-move abstracts were observed in all the four disciplines studied. In the Persian Literature abstracts, only one included a *Method* section. In order to probe into this, further interviews were conducted with some of the writers of the abstracts aiming to see if this choice was intentional. An author of the Persian Literature abstracts, for instance, believed that it would be redundant to do so, which is in sharp contrast with the English RA abstract:

In literary articles, when we write an abstract, ... , because the method is a norm in literary research, ..., for example when we want to study a literary term or concept such as the paradox, we refer to dictionaries and rhetorical books which have dealt with such terms. So if we mention the method in the abstract, we think we will exceed the 200-word norm. The method is often mentioned in student theses, or sometimes in the introduction to the paper itself. The reader only needs to know what new things you have in your abstract. And if they find this interesting, they may read the whole paper.

This is similar to Keshavarz and Atai's (2007) finding regarding the significance of various moves and order of moves between Persian and English speaking writers. In their corpus they did not find a significant difference between moves 1 (Establishing a Territory) and move 2 (Creating a Niche), though the difference in move 3 (Occupying the Niche) was statistically significant. It is also interesting to note their corpus consisted of research articles published in English while our corpus consisted of RAs published in Persian. This could have implications for further research into cross



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linguistic/cultural aspects of rhetorical organization of Persian and English academic texts.

Furthermore, we found that two important factors account for non-reference to the writer in RA abstracts under study. One is the modesty factor often valued by Iranian academics. The other is covert hedging used to mitigate academic claims. As explain before, this was achieved though triangulation of textual analysis by interview data, which is an improvement over previous research which exclusively used text analysis in their approach (e.g. Atai and Sadr, 2008; Harwood, 2005; Tang and John, 1999). Apart from the methodological contributions this might have for the importance of triangulation in qualitative research, this observation also shows that the same features observed in academic writing could have different underlying reasons.

For instance, lack of reference to the author is a common practice among the Persian Literature and Engineering academics, but the former often do this as a humbleness strategy or as covert hedging, while the latter are most probably influenced by the positivistic epistemology in natural sciences.

The results of this small scale study, though by no means conclusive, can have important pedagogical implications. One of the reasons for the rejection of papers written by non-native English speakers in refereed journals could be different expectations of journal reviewers and such writers of the communicative moves of RA abstracts, and the extent to which authors' presence should be textually realized. It seems that explicit teaching of macro and micro structural frameworks of English RA abstracts could increase the awareness of non-native speakers of English and the probability for the acceptance of their papers.

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