

USE OF TENSE-ASPECT FORMS IN CORDIS PROJECT REPORTS

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Abstract. For several recent decades the Council of Europe and various European authorities have been encouraging various European universities and other institutions to unite research activities resulting in the creation of partnerships with a conventionalised genre network of calls for projects, guidelines for proposals and databases of project documentation. Along with Latvia acting in political, economic and social arenas of the European Union, it has also been actively involved in research consortia as coordinator and participant, therefore, setting new objectives for communicative competence development of scholars and project managers in order to reflect the discursive practices. In view of this, the present cross-sectional empirical investigation is intended to explore the written genre of Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS) periodic (status) and closure (results in brief) project reports as fundamental documents to account for research results in various economically and socially significant spheres. The selected research methodology is a descriptive case study, involving genre and discourse analysis. The obtained results claim that reports have a rigid generic macro-structure. It explains the use of the selected tense-aspect forms to express the communicative aim in both types of reports; however, periodic reports demonstrate higher variation due to the involvement of a different discourse community. The significance of the study lies in the scarcity of previous research on this genre and wide application of research findings to support the discourse community of researchers.

Key words: CORDIS project reports, generic macro-structure, discourse analysis, tense-aspect forms

INTRODUCTION

Project management has infiltrated numerous branches, research not being an exception. Its popularity is determined by the fact that research and operational business activities undergo constant change and, therefore, require continuous improvement in response to social and market needs, customer feedback, rivals' and partners' actions. Moreover, breakthrough in technologies, governmental financial and information support as well as the accessibility of the European Union funds have also increased the number of projects implemented in companies and institutions.

Describing the research setting, it should be noted that the present study encompasses professional, organisational and institutional discourse as

the project reports in question reflect research and innovative entrepreneurial activities financially supported by the Council of Europe.

The significance of the study stems from the fact that project management is a comparatively new domain, thus, the network of genres pertinent to it is rather dynamic in its nature reflecting professional discursive processes. Moreover, documentation created across various business domains (IT, telecommunications, banking, pharmaceuticals, design) or academic research setting may vary greatly. Therefore, it is essential that a linguistic analysis of language variation in professional discourse should possess ‘the dynamic and context dependent character [...]. Discourse in real life occurs in situated professional events, which in turn take place in a complex set of contextual frameworks’ (Gunarsson, 2009: 4).

Moreover, the significance is also determined by the fact that the communicative aims of project reports from the CORDIS database of the Council of Europe have not been outlined. The existing research on the EU project management documentation is fragmented, e.g. Connor and Maurannen’s (1999) investigation of the generic macro-structure of grant proposals applying Swalesian genre analysis (Swales, 1990) and a social constructionist theory of genre by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) and contributing to both genre research and the teaching of academic writing. The study of the EU institutional language use focuses on the implementation of language policy (House, 2003; Phillipson, 2003), language conflicts (Ammon, 2006), selected linguistic features (Trebets, 2009; Online 1; Online 2) and the relation between language and power (Diez, 2014).

Given this, the present research aims to bridge this gap and explore the use of tense-aspect forms typical of every move of the CORDIS periodic and closure project reports, essential documents which inform about periodic results and achievements upon project closure.

The present study unfolds by looking into the situational context and generic macro-structure, followed by the analysis of tense-aspect forms. The theoretical basis for it has been grounded in the dogmas of professional, organisational and institutional discourse and English for Specific Purposes genre school. The empirical research method is a case study. The corpus for the research covers authentic materials of twenty project reports of Horizon 2020 and FP7 where Latvian researchers were involved as partners.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1 SITUATIONAL CONTEXT OF PROJECT REPORTS

When placing project reports in its situational context, the concepts of professional, organisational and institutional discourse should be addressed. The genre of the project report should be analysed on the basis of all the above-

mentioned terms as it is located at the intersection of the notions. There is no unanimous opinion among researchers regarding the use of the terms, namely, some scholars use them interchangeably (Grant et al., 2004), others (Mayr, 2008; Thornborrow, 2013) refer to an institution as to public organs of state, whereas organisations signify commercial corporations.

First, project report as a genre is subdued to the principles of institutional discourse, i.e. goal-oriented legitimate contributions of language produced by participants taking particular roles follow conventionalised rules in the EU public space (Illie 2001; Thornborrow 2013). Secondly, it follows the principles of organisational discourse as the participants involved the project management discursive processes are not only research institutions, but also innovative startups and enterprises whose discourse is context sensitive, intertextual and dynamic as it reflects organisational routine resulting in the collections of interactions, media of communication (i.e., oral, print, electronic) and genre networks (Grant et al., 2004). Last but not least, professional discourse is the most general term describing language use which is situated and dynamic, uncovering how professional life functions and also about how language works in different situations and contexts (Gunarsson, 2009).

Being aware of the fact that there is no clear-cut division, Gunarsson (ibid.) proposes the classification of discourse into professional and non-professional, the former possessing the following features: (1) expert discourse related to different domains, (2) goal-oriented, situated discourse, (3) conventionalised form of discourse, (4) discourse in a socially ordered group, (5) discourse dependent on various societal framework system, (6) dynamically changing discourse (ibid: 5). For the needs of the present paper the scholar's classification has been chosen as the main one. It is considered to be complete as it successfully reflects the principles of all three genre schools, i.e. Systemic-Functional, English for Specific Purposes and New Rhetoric. Within the framework of this study CORDIS is a repository and portal aiming to disseminate information on EU-funded research projects (Online 3) to a wide variety of expert discourse community, e.g. researchers, state authorities, project managers, practitioners and other stakeholders. It contains all public information about the projects, namely, project factsheets, periodic reports, final/closure reports, results in brief as well as the information for a broader public (news, events, success stories and hyperlinks) in a socially ordered group. It enables the stakeholders to follow the lifecycle of every project very closely through the relevant documentation which reflects discursive processes starting with grant details and finishing with closure reports or report summaries within a societal framework written by the participants and results in brief prepared by Publications Office of the European Union, on behalf of the European Commission's research Directorates-General and Agencies. When the reports are written by the participants of projects, they are dynamic and do not contribute to generic integrity with repeating discursive patterns and lexico-grammar forming recognisable genre structural identity. They account for variation depending

on the influence of the situational context. In contrast, closure reports (Results in Brief) written by the scientific editors contain conventionalised structure of obligatory and secondary rhetorical moves forming a stabilised not a dynamic genre.

To summarise, CORDIS project report as a genre is placed at the intersection of institutional, organisational and professional discourse. The unifying features typical of all types are the unquestionable influence of the discursive processes on document creation, discourse community of stakeholders, goal-oriented genres with distinct communicative aim and recognisable macro-structure, and recurrent linguistic features yet with room for dynamic changes.

2 PROJECT REPORT AS A GENRE

Bhatia assigns project reports to the colony of reporting genres, defining them as ‘reporting development as a part of a project/activity’ (Bhatia, 2004: 81). The scholar claims that this colony is ‘the most popular and overly used “generic values” in all contexts of professional discourse across disciplines and domains today’ (ibid.). Although numerous research papers have been devoted to the investigation of grammatical, lexical and syntactical peculiarities in science reports, inquiry reports, business reports (White, 1998; Yeung, 2007; Bhatia, 2014), and the investigation of rhetorical organisation and linguistic peculiarities of project reports is scarce, which can be explained by considerable variation within the colony and obscure boundaries among genres because of the changeable nature of the communicative event these reports describe.

Genre studies involve various frameworks used to investigate written genres constructed, recognised, interpreted and used by the members of discourse community. Bhatia states that ‘the analyses range from a close linguistic study of texts as discursive products, spanning across to investigations into dynamic complexities of communicative practices of professional and workplace communities, to a broader understanding of socio-cultural and critical aspects often employed in the process of interpreting these textual genres in a real life setting’ (Bhatia, 2017: 3). Similarly, Hyland regards genre analysis as

a branch of discourse analysis that explores specific uses of language. It is driven by a desire to understand the communicative character of discourse by looking at how individuals use language to engage in particular communicative situations. (Hyland, 2004: 195)

In the present empirical study, the grammatical phenomenon of tense-aspect forms is investigated at the level of rhetorical moves as staged communicative goals (Swales, 1990) applying Cohen and Upton’s research approach to genre analysis as it allows researchers to systematise the research design and build a consistent research procedure and comprises:

- 1) determining communicative purpose of the genre;
- 2) determining communicative aim of each text segment;

- 3) segmentation of full set of texts into moves;
- 4) classification of all moves by move type;
- 5) conducting linguistic analysis of all moves representing each move type;
- 6) description of move types in terms of the linguistic features of the moves;
- 7) analyzing the move structure of each text in terms of move types;
- 8) describing the corpus of texts in terms of typical and alternate move structures. (Cohen and Upton, 2009: 10)

Stages 7 and 8 will be excluded from the analysis of the empirical part as the focus of the research is rather on the use of the linguistic peculiarities than on genre analysis.

Swales' move and step framework for the analysis of research article introductions has been successfully generalised and transferred to many professional domains to research medical abstracts (Salager-Meyer, 1991), legalese (Bhatia 1997, 2014), advertisements (Bhatia, 2002, 2008) and advertorials (Zhou, 2012). However, it has not been applied to investigate project reports.

Concerning tense-aspect forms, Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002), Biber and Conrad (2009), highlight six major structural distinctions of the verb, namely:

- 1) tense (e.g. present or past);
- 2) aspect (e.g. unmarked/ Simple, Perfect, Continuous, Perfect Continuous);
- 3) voice (e.g. active or passive);
- 4) modality (e.g. unmarked (tensed) or modal);
- 5) negation (e.g. positive or negative);
- 6) clause structure type (e.g. declarative or interrogative).

Conducting the linguistic analysis, all of the above concepts except for modality will be considered. The notion of tense-aspect forms is viewed not only as the cases of 'a morphological change in the base form of the verb' (Lewis, 2002: 50; Biber et al., 2002), but also the relevance between the form of the verb and the notion of time (past, present, or future)' (Leech, 1989; Leech and Svartvik, 2002). There exists a contradiction among researchers if to consider future as tense (ibid.) or as modality (Biber et al., 2002). In the present research the former opinion is adopted.

The preliminary screening of the project reports revealed that most frequently used tense- aspect forms are Present Simple, Past Simple, Present Perfect, Future Simple, Present Continuous and Past Continuous; therefore, their meanings in context need to be investigated:

- 1) Present Simple to express permanent situations, facts, general truths, opinions, regular or repeated action, series of events/ actions, future in conditional and time clauses, with state verbs, with performative verbs, in headlines, with certain frequency adverbs;
- 2) Past Simple to describe finished past events, a series of past actions;

- 3) Present Perfect to outline experience, a recently finished action (emphasizing its completion), an action which started in the past and is still going on, an action which happened in the past but has present results;
- 4) Future Simple to present facts about future events;
- 5) Present Continuous to express the actions happening at the moment of speaking, short-term actions;
- 6) Past Continuous to describe an action happening at a particular time in the past, an action in the past lasting for some time, an ongoing action with a single event (the Past Simple) which interrupts it (Biber et al., 2002; Emmerson 2002; Huddleton and Pullum, 2006; Foley and Hall, 2012).

To sum up, project report belongs to one of the largest genre colony, yet it has not been analysed in depth. Genre studies propose various frameworks for analysis ranging from close linguistic investigation to complex study of professional practices behind genre creation, socio-cultural and critical perspective. The present empirical study looks at the grammatical phenomenon of tense-aspect forms pertinent to each rhetorical move to convey the communicative aims.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

The goals set at the beginning of the research determined the research methodology, namely, a descriptive case study that was performed, comprising genre analysis and discourse analysis and investigating the use of tense-aspect forms bound with the generic macro-structure. The theoretical framework was established based on the review of the secondary sources on the tenets of organisational, institutional and professional discourse, the ESP Genre School as well as the concepts of tense and aspect, forming the triangulation of theories.

The research unfolded by investigating the situational context in which the genre in question occurs. Afterwards, the generic macro-structure of twenty reports was determined, mapping each move with tense-aspect forms relevant to it of status and closure report was performed and subsequent data comparison was provided.

The preliminary screening of the project reports revealed its rigid generic macro-structure, which is a typical characteristic of the colony of reporting genres in institutional discourse performing transactional language metafunction. Moreover, this phenomenon is observed because periodic reports contain identical text segmentation proposed by the Council of Europe experts, whereas closure reports were created by scientific editors following genre conventions with the aim to popularise research results. It also explains a limited variety of tense-aspect forms to express the communicative aim, therefore, only selected forms were reviewed in the theoretical part. Genre conventional organisation of

closure reports contributes to the reliability of results, i.e. degree of consistency with which research results may be reproduced (Silverman, 2005).

The primary principles for selection were the involvement of Latvian researchers in the project implementation and report creation, the length and most recent date of publishing or changing. They also imposed limitations on the size of the corpus as not many documents could meet the criteria.

Research descriptive and interpretive validity is achieved by the elaboration of the research design and multi-level analysis resulting in thorough data outline (Maxwell, 1996; Dörnyei, 2007).

RESULTS

The analysis of the situational context applying Gunarsson's (2009) framework described in section 1 revealed the members of discourse community, their discursive processes within societal framework, the dynamic nature of project management discourse leading to the general communicative purpose of the genre in question, which is to inform about the lifecycle of every project very closely through the relevant documentation reflecting discursive processes from project initiation to closure and dissemination of research results.

1 ANALYSIS OF PERIODIC REPORTS

Conducting the analysis further following Cohen and Upton's (2009) genre analysis approach, the communicative aim of each text segment was determined, which is reflected in Table 1. Moreover, text segmentation of status reports, which is proposed by CORDIS scientific editors, coincided with move structure. However, since the content is generated by the project participants, it explains the fact that it is not homogeneous, e.g. Text 3 contains bullet points and numbered lists where tense-aspect forms are substituted with past participles and gerunds, whereas Text 5 comprises both grammatically complete sentences with the subject and the predicate and bulleted lists with non-finite forms.

Example 1: Leveraging national NCP structures. (Text 3)

The yielded data demonstrated various length of moves in periodic project reports and lower variation of tense-aspect forms.

The recurrent tense-aspect forms in Move 1, the number referring to the number of instances found, are Present Simple that expresses general facts about the projects, e.g. the project structure or set up and Future Simple to describe upcoming events during various stages (Figure 1).

Example 2: CIMULACT has the main purpose of proving and providing a process of making citizen-based scoping papers and topics for the last phase of Horizon 2020. In the next reporting period

the “enriched research scenarios” will be produced in a series of experimental methods in all 30 countries. (Text 5)

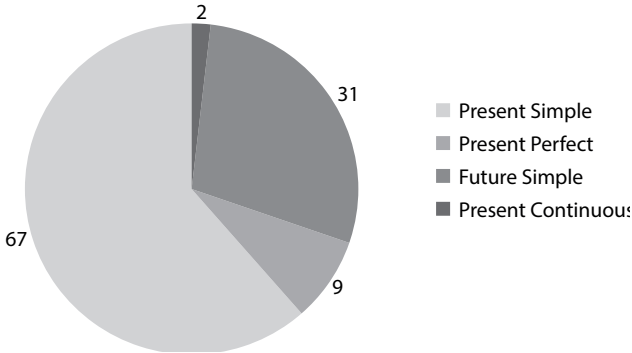


Figure 1 Use of tense-aspect forms in Move 1 of periodic reports

As presented in Figure 2, Move 2 demonstrates the frequent use of Present Perfect to describe a recently finished action (emphasizing its completion) or an action which happened in the past but has present results, for instance, to present the collected research data and describe data collection tools and Past Simple to refer to finished past events. Both forms can even occur in one sentence to draw a line between the completed stage of the project and the stage which will be further developed.

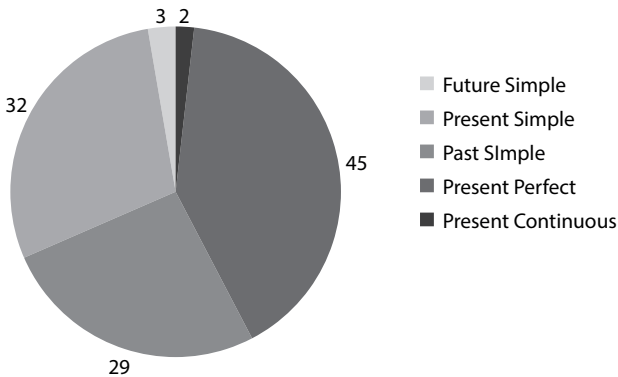


Figure 2 Use of tense-aspect forms in Move 2 of periodic reports

Example 3. The first prototypes of the Maturity Model, the Systemic Risk questionnaire and the engagement toll have been developed. Also, the current communication and engagement practices and existing platforms were reviewed, and a literature overview was made. (Text 4)

Present Simple is used to describe the research design or project structural elements.

Example 4: The CoP has a homepage that has a forum where all those involved in the industry share ideas, and is a repository for other 4D4F reports, namely the annual Research Priority Report, the Dairy Sensor Research Report, and the Industry Innovations Report. (Text 2)

Move 3 contains the recurrent instances of Past Simple to describe finished past events as above, Present Perfect to represent a recently finished action (emphasizing its completion) in relation to the achieved project results (Figure 3).

Example 5. This has been accomplished in the first reporting period by several activities. First of all, all produced visions, societal needs and research scenarios have been made available to project officers (POs) as they were produced. (Text 5)

Future Simple along with Present Simple in the passive outline forthcoming project activities and expected milestones.

Example 6. In the next reporting period the ‘enriched research scenarios’ will be produced in a series of experimental methods in all 30 countries. These will be transformed into ‘pre-topics’, which will be worked upon in collaboration between the consortium and the POs during a working conference in December 2016. The outcome is expected to be several topics, which can be implemented in the next programme period of Horizon 2020. (Text 5)

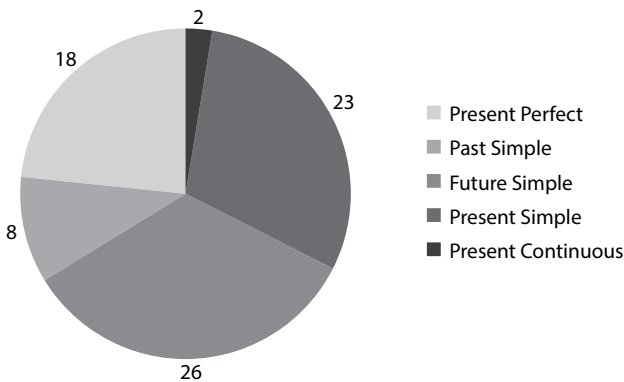


Figure 3 Use of tense-aspect forms in Move 3 of periodic reports

The results of the study are summarised in Table 1 below and demonstrate the dependency of the choice of tense-aspect forms on the communicative aim of the move under analysis.

Table 1 Text segmentation and move structure in periodic CORDIS project reports

Text segment/ Move	Communicative aim	Recurrent tense-aspect forms
Summary of the context and overall objectives of the project	To provide background information on the project set up, research participants, research topicality as well as research objectives.	Present Simple Future Simple Present Perfect
Work performed from the beginning of the project to the end of the period covered by the report and main results	To describe project methodology, procedure and deliverables.	Past Simple Present Perfect Present Simple
Progress beyond the state of the art and expected potential impact	To outline the uniqueness of the project outcomes, socio-economic impact and wider societal implications.	Present Perfect Present Simple Future Simple

2 ANALYSIS OF CLOSURE REPORTS

The text segmentation of CORDIS closure reports (Results in Brief), which is also very similar to move structure, is proposed by the author of the research and is presented in Table 2 below. Its distinctive feature is a lead sentence or a paragraph, containing the significance of the research to attract the attention of the stakeholders which is marked in bold. Together with the next segment they constitute one move. Its recurrent linguistic features are presented in Figure 4 and comprise Past Simple and Present Perfect to summarise the key initiatives undertaken within the framework of the project and Present Simple to introduce the research context and general facts. The ongoing actions or research background are introduced by Present Continuous.

Example 7. An EU initiative set out to ensure the reliability of pipelines transporting crude oil, natural gas and liquid petroleum products across eastern and western European markets. (Text 11)

Example 8. The science of photonics, where light and electronics meet, has applications in a wide range of industries. (Text 13)

Example 9. Latvia joined the EU in 2004, and the EU has been helping to improve the country's Research Institute of Biotechnology and Veterinary Medicine Sigrā. (Text 20)

Example 10. EU funding is being used to help boost Latvian research in the area of food quality, and hence public health. Achievements to date include staff exchanges and equipment upgrades, initiating a fruitful new era of Latvian–EU collaboration. (Text 20)

Similarly, Past Simple and Present Simple tense-aspect forms are used further to elaborate on the research background, setting and background and aims.

Example 11. As a result the EU-funded ‘Baltic popular science TV show Futureshock’ (Futureshock) project chose television as its medium of choice to help people get a better sense of scientific achievements. (Text 16)

Example 12. The general objective of the project was to give those who have nothing to do with science more insight into the achievements of scientific endeavour generally. (Text 16)

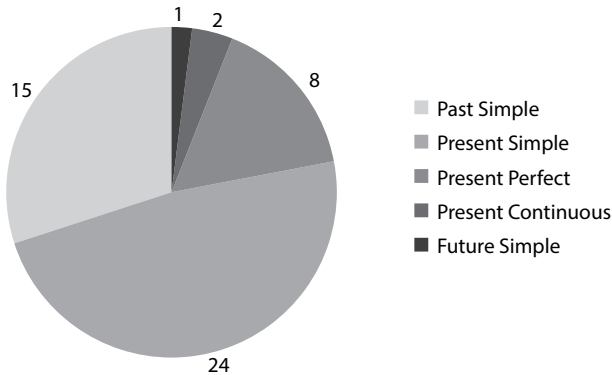


Figure 4 Use of tense- aspect forms in Move 1 of project closure reports

The next move outlines the procedure how the research unfolds and the main deliverables, therefore, Past Simple to describe a series of finished events with some rare cases of Past Perfect to refer to prior actions and Past Continuous to emphasise the duration of the action are used. Present Perfect highlights the accomplished results (Figure 5). This move demonstrates the least variation of forms, whereas it is the longest. The distribution of forms across the reports is not even. The use of Past Perfect appears in only one report (Text 19).

Example 13 It developed various analytical, numerical and numerical-experimental methods to accurately characterise damage found on pipelines using the long-range ultrasonic technique. (Text 12)

Example 14. However, very few Latvian participants had actually taken up the position of coordinator in these research projects. (Text 19)

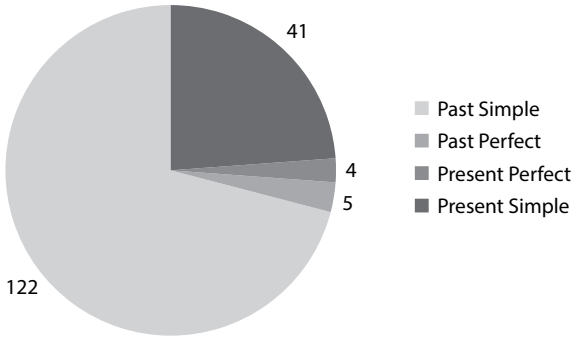


Figure 5 Use of tense-aspect forms in Move 2 of project closure reports

The data of the last move is summarised in Figure 6. The move is intended to connect the results with further research; therefore, Past Simple and Future Simple forms prevail. In some instances, Present Perfect is used in combination with Future Simple in this move and the emphasis is put on recently completed events (Example 12). In four project reports this move was not recognised.

Example 15. Scientists have contributed comprehensive computer-aided design methodology and protocols for research and evaluation of hybrids. Together with models to predict performance criteria with minimal uncertainty, the tools will support knowledge-based advances in the hybrid aircraft model that has captured global attention. (Text 14)

Example 16. INNOPIPES improved existing methods and developed new ones to better detect and repair volumetric surface defects. This will ensure efficient and safe operation of current pipeline networks spanning Europe. (Text 12)

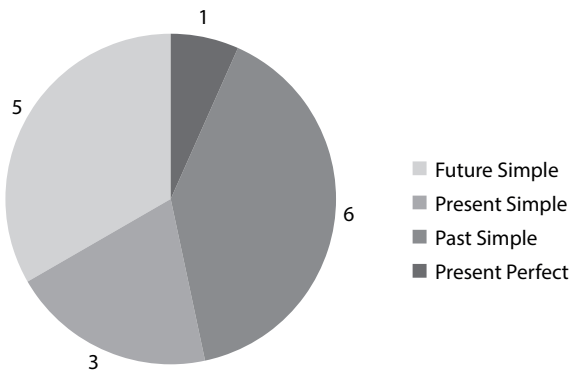


Figure 6 Use of tense-aspect forms in Move 3 of project closure reports

Table 2 below outlines the data on text segmentation, move structure and recurrent tense aspect forms in CORDIS closure reports.

Table 2 Text segmentation and move structure in CORDIS closure reports

Move	Text segment	Communicative aim	Recurrent tense-aspect forms
Establishing project context	Lead	To express the topicality of the research activities	Past Simple Present Simple Present Continuous
	Describing project context	To describe the project aims and background	Present Perfect Past Simple Present Simple
Describing project procedure and results	Outlining project procedure and results	To outline the research procedure, flow and the main outcomes	Past Simple Past Perfect Present Simple Present Perfect
Highlighting further research	Envisaging further research	To describe future impact of results and further research	Present Simple Present Perfect Past Simple Future Simple

The comparison of the data presented above enables us to conclude that the choice of the tense-aspect forms is determined to a large extent by the communicative aim of each move. Closure reports demonstrate greater variation of linguistic phenomena in comparison with periodic reports, which can be explained by the discourse community members involved in the process of creation. Namely, professional scientific editors generate the former and project participants draw up the latter. Since there are no conventions, there is no consistency among the use of the forms in periodic reports, and the choice sometimes depends on personal preferences, e.g. to describe project context, the authors of Text 13 use Present Simple, while the writers of Text 14 apply Past Simple to express the same communicative aim. Simple forms prevail in all moves as they are aimed at reflecting general facts or scientific phenomena, finished past events outlining the project flow and future research endeavour.

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted research results suggest both periodic and closure project reports have a relatively similar generic macro-structure, the major moves being the outline of research context, describing the main outcome and envisaging future research. Since the former document is written by the project participants

themselves, the length and the move structure contribute to genre dynamic nature. The distribution of forms pertinent to each move is not even and depends to a large extent on authors' individual preference. The latter is drawn up by the scientific editors of the Council of Europe, leading to the consistency of move structure and the use of a wider variety of linguistic means. However, last move of closure reports is not recognised in some reports, which contributes to the dynamism of closure report. The choice of tense-aspect forms is correlated with the communicative aim of each move.

The topics for further research might comprise the stylistic diversity of most and least frequently used tense-aspect forms, the sequence of steps in each move or the use of infinitives and participles as they are recognised in abundance. The investigation of the situational context reveals other genres of the communicative event within the same societal framework to reflect other discursive practices; thus, intertextual relation among them as well as their generic macro-structure and recurrent linguistic features might be investigated. The research design might also be attributed to a more extensive corpus, however, according to the preliminary screening the obtained results should not differ considerably.

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