

# MOVES IN THE INTRODUCTION SECTIONS OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS RESEARCH ARTICLES

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**Abstract.** Interest in the research article as a representative of a genre in different disciplines has resulted in many studies, which are essential for English for Academic Purposes. The present paper deals with move sequences in the Introduction sections of research articles in two journals in applied linguistics. The analysis of ten introductions from each journal is based on the Swales's Create a Research Space model published in 1990. The results demonstrate that the writers use not only the M1-M2-M3 pattern, but also a variety of other move sequences in the Introduction section. It is observed that the headings of research articles may be misleading. The Introduction discussed in Swales's IMRD model refers more to the Introductory part than the Introductory section. It is concluded that the Swales's IMRD and CARS models may need elaboration to make them more applicable for teaching research article writing in applied linguistics.

**Key words:** applied linguistics, research articles, the Introduction section, move analysis, moves, steps

## INTRODUCTION

The Introduction is considered to be a difficult section of a research paper, as it is necessary to decide what to include in it and how to arrange the information (Swales, 1990: 137; Swales and Feak, 1994: 173). It may be even harder for those who need to report their studies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In recent years, there has been a tendency to focus on move analysis of research articles in different disciplines. Such findings are very useful for non-native students and teachers.

Swales and Najjar (1987: 187), for example, found that there are discrepancies between the style manuals and actual papers in the field. The previous research demonstrated that there may be variations of move sequences not only across different disciplines (e.g. Peacock, 2002; Samraj, 2002), but also within a discipline (e.g. applied linguistics: Yang and Allison, 2003; 2004; agriculture: del Saz-Rubio, 2011; chemistry: Stoller and Robinson, 2013; law: Tessuto, 2015). Several reasons for different ways of writing research articles (henceforth RAs) have been mentioned, for example, differences in traditions in hard and soft sciences, difference for the need of information in established

and less mature disciplines and/or culture differences (e.g. Dahl, 2004; Kanoksilapatham, 2007, 2012; Fakhri, 2004, 2009; Sheldon, 2011; Gea-Valor, Rey-Rocha and Moreno, 2014).

Hirano (2009) carried out a contrastive analysis of Brazilian Portuguese and English research article introductions (henceforth RAIs) within the subfield of applied linguistics (i.e. teaching English for Specific Purposes) and concluded that the introductions in English RAs followed the CARS model (see Swales, 1990; Swales and Feak, 1994), but the introductions in Brazilian Portuguese had a different pattern. Moreover, Jalilifar's paper (2010: 52) pointed to the need to pay more attention to the intra-disciplinary variation in structuring RAIs. It was noted that 'the elements of persuasions and promotions are more strongly present in international ESP [English for Specific Purposes] and DA [Discourse analysis] research projects alluding to the relatively young and interdisciplinary nature of EGP [English for General Purposes]'.

The goal of the present study is to do move analysis of the Introduction section of RAs in applied linguistics, namely the papers published in the journal of *Applied Linguistics* and *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*. The previous research on the journal *Applied Linguistics* was carried out by Yang and Allison (2003; 2004). They analysed four journals (1996 and 1997 issues), including the journal of *Applied Linguistics*. In 2003 they analysed the results regarding the conclusion sections of RAs, and in 2004, the Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion (or IMRD) structure; thus, they discussed sections, not moves in each section. Moreover, Swales and Najjar's study (1987: 183) showed that the way the introductions are structured may change over a period of time.

The following research question is posed: Which are the typical sequences of moves and steps in the Introduction section of RAs in applied linguistics?

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There is no unanimous view concerning the number of sections in RAs. Swales (1990) considers that the Introduction is one of the four parts of a RA, the others being the Methods, Results and Discussion sections. If Swales combines Discussion and Conclusions in one section, Yang and Allison (2004) separate them. They point out that the section *Pedagogic Implications* is frequently used in applied linguistics RAs (Yang and Allison, 2003).

Each genre has its distinctive features (Bhatia, 2006: 83) in terms of its communicative purposes and structure. Bhatia (2006: 82) views the RAI as a genre within the genre colony of academic introductions. Swales (2011: 8) suggests a more appropriate term, a *part-genre*. The Create a Research Space or CARS model (Swales, 1990) is commonly used in order to investigate the structure of the RAIs (see Appendix 1). Although this model has later been revised by the author (e.g. Swales and Feak, 1993; Swales, 2004), its first version has still been used in the studies on applied linguistics (e.g. Ozturk, 2007),

mentioning the reason that ‘there are discrepancies between the model and some aspects and features of RA introductions’ (Atai and Habibie, 2012: 27).

Bhatia (2006) distinguishes between *moves* and *steps* (also called *stages* or *submoves*) and *rhetorical strategies*. Strategies are variations in the moves which can be realised depending on ‘the nature of the discipline, intended audience, the relationship between the writer and the reader, the status of published work in the area’ (ibid.: 86). The writer may choose any of the strategies ‘to fulfil the same aspect of the communicative purpose’ (ibid.: 86). Bhatia also stresses that expert writers may be more flexible in structuring their texts. Thus, there may be typical and atypical ways of sequencing information in RAIs. For example, Swales and Feak (1994) consider that it is uncommon to start the RAI with the purpose of the paper as its usual place is towards the end of it. The RAI proceeds ‘from general discussion of the topic, to the particular question or hypothesis being investigated’ (Swales and Feak, 1994: 156). The studies on RAIs show that the writers may be following different move sequences. Move 1 and Move 2 may form cycles in longer introductions (Swales, 1990: 162–163). Move 2 may be neglected in English RAIs, for example, in the *Journal of Second Language Writing* (Ozturk, 2007). Some linguists consider that this may be explained by avoidance of criticizing the previous studies in some cultures (Taylor and Chen, 1991: 32). When investigating introductions to the RAs from the *Physical Review* and the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Swales and Najjar (1987) found that ‘the authors referred to their results before providing them’; for example, ‘The major objective of the study was ... . The results were intended to aid decisions...’ (Swales and Najjar, 1987: 186).

In a study devoted to RAs in applied linguistics, Yang and Allison (2004: 275) pointed out that section headings may be misleading because the author’s attitude to verbalizing them may be unpredictable, that is, the communicative purpose of the section may differ from similar cases in other RAs. They grouped them into conventional (*Introduction, Theoretical Basis, Literature Review* – the last two functioning as subheadings in the Introduction section) and unconventional (e.g. *Context, Theoretical Framework: Contrastive pragmatics, The Study, Background, Previous research*) headings (ibid.: 270).

## METHODS

The present study is based on the analysis of 20 RAIs selected from two journals: *Applied Linguistics* (henceforth AL) and *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics* (henceforth CJAL). Both the journals are refereed and are published on a regular basis. Ten papers from each journal published from 2010–2014 were randomly selected for the analysis. The corpus was restricted to empirical RAs.

When selecting the section for the analysis, it was found that different steps from Move 3, which is common in the Introduction section, were located under other headings. As shown in Appendix 2, the research questions (M3 S1b:

*Announcing present research*) were outlined in the Methods (A2, CJAL) or Methodology section (A3, CJAL). In A7 (CJAL), the purpose of the study (M3S1a: *Outlining purposes*) and the research questions were announced only in the Study section. In A5 (CJAL), the Study section provided the repetition of the purpose of the study mentioned in the Introduction section:

Cf. (1) This article reports on a province-wide study commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) to examine the role and feasibility of implementing the CEFR to improve French as a Second Language (FSL) learning outcomes across the province. This paper focuses on teachers' perspectives on implementing CEFR-informed approaches in FSL classrooms in Ontario. (Introduction, A 5, CJAL; underlining mine)

(2) The purpose of the broader study was to examine the feasibility of using the CEFR as a frame of reference for FSL education programs in the province of Ontario in Canada. More specifically, the study intended to examine if and how the CEFR might enhance the FSL educational experiences of teachers and students in Ontario. This paper focuses on teachers' perspectives on the CEFR's action-oriented approach. (The Study, A 5, CJAL; underlining mine)

As seen in Appendix 2, the Introduction section alone (i.e. a section before the Methods section) was found in one RA in AL (A4 without a heading) and in 3 RAs in CJAL (A3, A4 and A7). Table 1 shows that the selected RAs contained a variety of headings and subheadings, which followed the section named *Introduction*, which could be viewed as the Introductory part of the RA in terms of the Swales's IMRD model. In one RA (A3, CJAL), the Introduction section contained subsections, which according to Yang and Allison's (2004) view could be an appropriate strategy in organizing information to introduce the research; however, the Swales's model does not envisage the use of subheadings. A few RAs had even several sections with headings and subheadings before the Methods section, where the writers highlighted the major sections of their paper (e.g. *Introduction, Related Research, Research questions* in A6, CJAL). In the selected RAs, the space provided for the topic generalizations and/or previous research was even larger than the one allowed for the Introduction section. The function of those sections was to expand on the topic announced in the Introduction. It was also found that three moves from the RAIs were located under one heading, namely the corpus and the structure of the paper were also discussed under the heading *Research questions* (A1; AL). These findings correspond to an earlier study carried out by Yang and Allison (2004), who stated that the content announced in the headings may be misleading. Thus, it turned out that several sections and subsections represented the communicative purpose of the Introduction section mentioned in the Swales's CARS model. This demonstrates that the

writers may be more flexible in structuring their papers in applied linguistics than it is envisaged in the IMRD and CARS models, where subheadings are not mentioned.

*Table 1* Distribution of headings and subheadings

Headings	AL	CJAL
No heading 'Introduction'	2	0
Introduction	3	10
Introduction: the study of grammatical patterns	1	0
Introduction with 1 or 4 subheadings	1	1
Review of (the) literature	1	1
Literature review with 8 subheadings	0	1
Related research	0	1
Background/Background literature (both with 2 subheadings)	1	1
Background and previous studies	0	1
Other headings	6	3
Other headings (with 1–2 subheadings)	2	0
Objectives/Research objectives	2	0
Research questions	0	3

Due to the controversies in move distribution in the selected RAs, the Introduction section was chosen for the present study (similar to Ozturk's study, 2007). It was a section with or without the heading *Introduction*, which followed the abstract or two abstracts (the abstracts are written in English and French in CJAL) and preceded the next section or subsection. As mentioned above, Swales's (1990) CARS model has been widely used in the previous studies in applied linguistics, and, thus, could provide a good basis for the comparison of findings also this time.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1 MOVE SEQUENCES

The volume of the RAIs ranged from 224 to 1060 words in AL and from 176 to 1598 in CJAL, the largest diversity of the length of the RAIs being in the latter journal (see Tables 2 and 3). The average length of the Introduction sections was 562.6 in AL and 624.1 in CJAL. The analysis of RAIs demonstrates that the writers in both journals employ a variety of move sequences, that is, from two (A8, AL; A5 and A6, CJAL) to nine moves (A4, AL).

**Table 2 Move sequences in the RAIs in AL**

Articles	Moves in AL	Moves (N)	Length of RAIs (N of words)
A 1	M1-M2-M1-M2-M3 ( <i>Research questions*</i> , including corpus and structure)	5	591
A 2	M1-M3-M2-M3	4	664
A 3	M1-M2-M3-M1-M3	5	1060
A 4	M1-M2-M1-M2-M1-M2-M3-M1-M3	9	679
A 5	M1-M2-M3	3	224
A 6	M3-M1-M2-M3-M2	5	238
A 7	M1-M2-M3	3	526
A 8	M1-M3	2	273
A 9	M1-M3-M2-M3-M1	5	949
A 10	M1-M2-M3-	3	422
<b>Mean</b>		4.4	562.6

\*the subsection was not included in the present study

**Table 3 Move sequences in the RAIs in CJAL**

Articles	Moves in CJAL	Moves (N)	Length of RAIs (N of words)
A 1	M1-M2-M3	3	182
A 2	M1-M2-M3	3	203
A 3	M1-M2-M3 (with 4 subsections*)	3	690
A 4	M1-M2-M3-M1-M2-M3	6	1598
A 5	M1-M3	2	176
A 6	M1-M3	2	186
A 7	M1-M2-M1-M2-M1	5	1457
A 8	M1-M2-M1-M3-M1-M2-M3	7	810
A 9	M1-M3-M2	3	615
A 10	M1-M3	2	324
<b>Mean</b>		3.6	624.1

\*the subsections were not included in the present study

It was interesting that there was no correlation between the length of the RAIs and the number of moves. The longest articles contained fewer moves in both the journals: A3 with 1060 words had only 5 moves in AL; A4 with 1598 words had only 6 moves in CJAL. The articles with the largest number of moves

were shorter: A4 with 9 moves had only 679 words in AL; A8 with 7 moves had 810 words in CJAL. The mean of the moves was smaller in the journal with longer RAIs (cf. 3.6 moves with 624.1 average number of words in AL vs. 4.4 moves with 562.6 average number of words in CJAL). This corresponds to Ozturk's (2007) findings, where no link was established between the volume of the RAIs and the number of moves in them, as shorter RAIs had more complex move sequences.

Table 4 demonstrates that three moves (35%) dominated in the journals, namely, it was the M1-M2-M3 pattern (30% in AL, 40% in CJAL), indicated in the CARS model. It was similar to Ozturk's (2007) study of two subdisciplines in applied linguistics (i.e. the journals: *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* (SSLA) and the *Journal of Second Language Writing* (JSLW)), where it was stated that this pattern was the most frequently used in the selected corpus; however, it was the dominating pattern only in the first journal (cf. 60% in SSLA; 10% in JSLW). Although Ozturk found that the M1-M3 pattern prevailed in his corpus, it was found only in the JSWL (30%). In the present study, it was also the second most frequently used pattern (30% in CJAL; 10% in AL). As for the number of moves, however, different five move sequences dominated in AL (40%), while three move sequences prevailed in CJAL (40%).

**Table 4 The number of moves in the journals**

Number of moves	AL (N)	CJAL (N)	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
1	0	0	0	0
2	1	3	4	20
3	3	4	7	35
4	1	0	1	5
5	4	1	5	25
6	0	1	1	5
7	0	1	1	5
8	0	0	0	0
9	1	0	1	5

Ozturk considers that the M1-M2-M3 move pattern seems to be more common in 'established' sub-disciplines (Ozturk, 2007), while 'emerging' sub-disciplines may prefer to allow more space to Move 1, namely M1S2 (*Making topic generalization(s)*) and M1S3 (*Reviewing of previous research*). He believes that editorial policy may have an impact on this preference, as the journal may deal with various topics; thus, it may be necessary to have more background information in the RA. It may also be important to provide more information about the local, less known for readers, background of the study in international journals.

## 2 STEPS AND THEIR LINGUISTIC SIGNALS

In the next stage, the frequency of steps was calculated. As seen in the figure below, there is no sharp difference between the distribution of moves and steps in both journals. However, it can be noticed that M2S1c (*Question-raising*) was not found in the present corpus, although the research questions from *Announcing present research* could have been a similar step. Like Swales, who indicated that M2S1a (*Counter-claiming*) is uncommon in research papers, it was not found in this corpus either. M2S1d (*Continuing a tradition*) and M3S2 (*Announcing principal findings*) were rarely used in both the journals. Thus, it seems to be uncommon to emphasise that the paper continues the tradition. Findings seem to be introduced by mentioning the structure of the paper in a few RAs without providing more details about them.

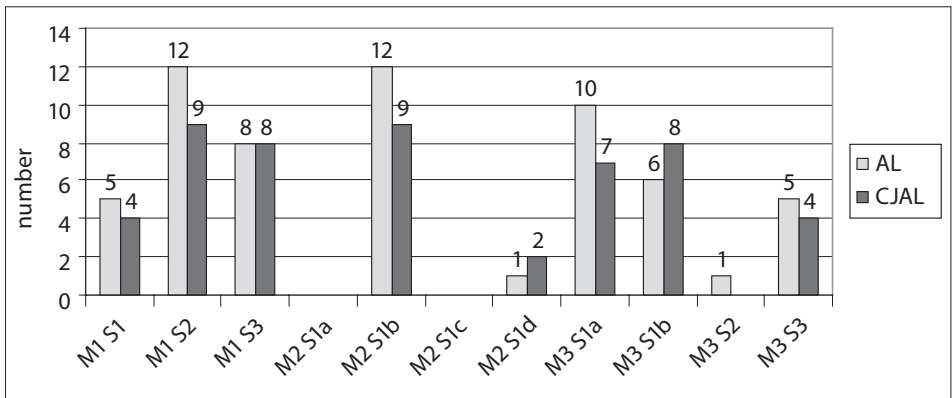


Figure 1 The number of moves and steps in the journal *Applied Linguistics* and *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*

In the RAIs of the present corpus, the writers inform their reader not only about the previous findings and their shortcomings and the purposes of the present study, but also provide general information concerning the topic, for example, the definitions and classification of the terms or notions (e.g. A1, A7 in AL; A 6 in CJAL) and/or the description of the current situation in teaching in the country (e.g. A4, in AL; A3, A8 in CJAL). Much space is devoted to Move 1 and Move 2.

The table below provides samples of linguistic means signalling moves and steps.



Table 5 Samples of linguistic signals of moves and their steps

Moves	Function	Signals
M1 S1	Claiming centrality	Much research has been devoted in the past few years ... (A5, AL) A growing number of studies reveal ... (A 4, CJAL)
M1 S2	Making topic generalizations	CLCs can be used to investigate (A2, AL) Danish and Italian are ... (A4, CJAL)
M1S3	Reviewing items of previous research	Previous research has focused mainly on ... (A1, AL) Elder and Manwaring (2004) found that (A7, CJAL)
M2S1b	Indicating a gap	Less attention has been paid to ... (A1; AL) ... this study is the first investigation (A8, CJAL)
M2S1d	Continuing a tradition	... the subject of many studies between the late 1950s and the 1980s, (A8, CJAL)
M3S1a	Outlining purposes	The research purpose of the corpus will to a certain degree decide what ... (A1, AL) In contrast, this article reports... Specifically, it presents (A 4, AL) The aim of this work ... (A 8, CJAL)
M3S1b	Announcing present research	I choose the term grammatical patterns ... (A9, AL) More specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions (A7, CJAL)
M3S3	Indicating RA structure	The paper is organized in the following sections... (A1, AL)

These clues seem to be more helpful in navigating the text than the misleading section headings, which have been discussed above.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the RA macro-structure reveals that the Introduction section does not correspond to what is meant by the 'Introduction' in the IMRD model, as there are several longer sections with or without subheadings following the section labelled 'Introduction' and preceding the Methods section in the present corpus. The Introduction may also have subsections. Sometimes the moves do not correspond to the headings of the sections as in the case of the heading *Research questions* and the inclusion of the information about the corpus and the structure of the study. Thus, the headings not always help to navigate the text, which should be their main function.

One or several sections with or without subsections devoted to the theoretical background of the study are frequently included in the RAIs between the Introduction section and the Methods section. The move devoted to literature review seems to be frequently used in the RAs in applied linguistics (Yang and Allison, 2004), which may be explained with a need for the background information in journals which include different subfields.

It should be emphasised that the Introductions in the journals follow the three move (M1-M2-M3) sequence less frequently, as writers in applied linguistics apply other, more complex strategies in sequencing their Introductions. Furthermore, some moves typical of the RAIs may also be located in the Methods section.

As the present study demonstrated a variety of move sequences in the RAIs, it is important to continue the research not only on the Introduction section, but expand it to the Introductory part of RAs and search for the circumstances which have determined the selection of sections and subsections and their headings. If previous research is discussed not only in the section named *Introduction*, but also in other sections (e.g. *Literature review*, *Methods*, *Conclusions*), it should not be specified as one of the moves typical of just one section. Thus, the moves and their steps could have been more general. For example, Stoller and Robinson (2013) have suggested three moves in article introductions in a chemistry journal useful for EAP: (1) *Introduce the research area* (with 3 steps: *Identify the research area*, *Establish the importance of the research area* and *Provide essential background information about the research area*), (2) *Identify the gap(s)* and (3) *Fill the gap(s)* (with 2 steps: *Introduce the current work* and the optional step *Preview key findings of the current work*). Similarly, RAIs in applied linguistics could have three moves. Move 1 *Introducing the theme of the research article* may have the following steps: (1) *Identifying the theme and its importance* and (2) *Providing essential background*. Move 2 *Identifying the gap* could have no steps, while Move 3 *Outlining the present study* could include several steps, for example, the purpose, the research questions and/or hypotheses, the structure of the paper. The third move still should be more researched to specify its steps.

Thus, the elaboration of both models (IMRD and CARS) is needed in order to make them more applicable for doing genre analysis of RAs in the EFL classroom. In the next study, more attention should be focused on enlarging the number of the papers for analysis as well as on different sections and subsections of RAs in applied linguistics. It is important to search for possible influences on the writers' choices in structuring their papers.

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## RESEARCH ARTICLES ANALYSED

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## APPENDIX 1

A CARS model of article introductions (Swales, 1990: 141)

Moves	Steps
Move 1—Establishing a territory	Step 1 Claiming centrality and/or Step 2 Making topic generalization(s) and/or Step 3 Reviewing items of previous research
Move 2—Establishing a niche	Step 1A Counter-claiming or Step 1B Indicating a gap or Step 1C Question-raising or Step 1D Continuing a tradition
Move 3—Occupying the niche	Step 1A Outlining purposes or Step 1B Announcing present research Step 2 Announcing principal findings Step 3 Indicating RA structure

## APPENDIX 2

Headings of sections before the Methods section

Articles	Headings in AL	Headings in CJAL
A 1	<b>Introduction</b> (1 subheading: <i>Research questions</i> where also the corpus and the structure of the paper are discussed); <b>The expression of disagreement in business English textbooks</b> (1 subheading)	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>Review of the literature;</b> <b>Research questions</b>
A 2	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>The importance of reliable proficiency-level assignment of corpus texts;</b> <b>Methods for proficiency-level assignment in clcs</b>	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>Strategies for processing unfamiliar words in reading comprehension;</b> <b>Strategies for processing; Unfamiliar words in listening comprehension;</b> (Methods, where the research questions are discussed)

Articles	Headings in AL	Headings in CJAL
A 3	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>Objectives</b>	<b>Introduction</b> (with 4 subheadings: <i>Core French education in Canada; Core French education in British Columbia; Pre-service teacher education in British Columbia; Theoretical perspectives</i> ); (Methodology, where the key questions are mentioned)
A 4	No heading	<b>Introduction</b>
A 5	No heading; <b>Collaborative dialogue;</b> <b>Collaborative dialogue and learner–learner interaction;</b> <b>Research on learners interaction</b> (also the purpose and research questions are discussed)	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>French as a second language in Canada;</b> <b>The Common European Framework of Reference: Potential and limitations;</b> (The Study, where the purpose is discussed)
A 6	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>Creativity, verbal art, language play, and verbal humour</b> (2 subheadings)	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>Related research;</b> <b>Research questions</b>
A 7	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>ELF interaction</b>	<b>Introduction;</b> (The Study, where the purpose and research questions and discussed)
A 8	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>Review of literature</b>	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>Background and previous studies</b>
A 9	<b>Introduction: the study of grammatical patterns;</b> <b>Vocabulary analyzed: semiterms;</b> <b>Research objectives</b>	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>Literature review</b> (8 subheadings)
A 10	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>Background</b> (2 subheadings)	<b>Introduction;</b> <b>Background literature</b> (2 subheadings); <b>Research questions</b>

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