

Genre Analysis of Oxford and Tabriz Applied Linguistics Research Article Abstracts: From Move Structure to Transitivity Analysis

Biok Behnam¹, Jafar Zamanian^{*2}

1, 2, Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

*Corresponding author: jafarzamanian@gmail.com

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Abstract

Following Swales's (1981) works on genre analysis, studies on different sections of research articles in different languages and fields abound. This paper compares Applied Linguistics research article abstracts published in Oxford University and Islamic Azad University of Tabriz in English using Swales's (1981-1990) move structure model and Halliday's (1994) description of transitivity processes. One hundred and forty eight English research article abstracts were analyzed at macro and micro level based on the Swales's model (IMRD) and transitivity system. The results demonstrated that the four structural moves of Swales and transitivity processes of Halliday were evident in both abstract sets but were differently distributed. The research suggests pedagogical implications for TEFL practitioners, especially for the writing skill and for the preparing research article abstracts (RAAs).

Keywords: genre analysis, transitivity process, research articles, IMRD

Introduction

Genre analysis has been in the limelight for more than two decades. The increasing interest in this discipline is motivated by a need to supply models of academic and scientific texts for the students, so that they can produce those texts appropriately. The purpose of the publication of research articles (RA) is to present new knowledge to members of the academic community. In order to persuade the members of the academic communities, articles should include clear abstracts. The abstract is one of the most important sections of the RA; it can determine the acceptance or rejection of an article for conferences, and its selection by readers.

Since Swales's (1981, 1990) work, there have been numerous studies on different sections of the RA, such as Brett (1994) and Williams (1999) on the Results; Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988), Holmes (1997) and Fallahi and Erzi (2003) on the Discussion section and Lim (2006) on Method section. Nevertheless, as Swales (1990) also mentions, the abstract, as a genre, has received insufficient attention from the researchers. Some research has been conducted into the genre of academic article abstracts in English (Anderson & Maclean, 1997; Gibson & Kaplan et al., 1999; Cross & Oppenheim, 2006; Duncan, 2008; Lores, 2004; Salager-Meyer, 1991), but a gap can still be observed. None of the studies mentioned above has considered the different moves in abstracts as well as the study on the transitivity system.

The present study aimed at filling the abovementioned gaps by focusing on different moves presented by Swales (1981, 1990) and also the transitivity system proposed by Halliday (1994). The articles are chosen from the Applied Linguistics Journal of Oxford (ALJO) published by Oxford University from 2004 to 2008 and from the Applied Linguistics Journal of Tabriz (ALJT) published by Islamic Azad University, Tabriz branch from 2008 to 2012. The researchers reckon that there has never been such comparative study on these numbers of research articles before.

In this study a more elaborated model proposed by Swales (1981, 1990) was employed which includes four moves (IMRD). Therefore, the aim of this paper is to see to what extent RA abstracts published in two different universities comply with the Swales's (1981, 1990) model and Halliday's

(1994) transitivity system. Basically, the main purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do the "Research Article Abstracts" (RAAs) of Applied Linguistics Journal of Tabriz (ALJT) correspond to the combined move model based on Swales's (1981, 1990) model?
2. To what extent do the "Research Article Abstracts" (RAAs) of Applied Linguistics Journal of Oxford (ALJO) correspond to the combined move model based on Swales's (1981, 1990) model?
3. What types of processes in terms of Halliday's (1994) transitivity system can be found in the data?
4. What are the differences between ALJT and ALJO research article abstracts in terms of Halliday's transitivity systems in each move?

Move analysis in Research Article

Genre is defined "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes" (Swales, 1990, p. 58). The definition shows that a genre is categorized according to its communicative purpose. A description of the rhetorical structure of a genre in terms of moves has played an important role in the genre analysis field. As one of the pioneers, Swales (1981, 1990) conducted a move-step analysis on the structure of RA introductions. After that, genre analysts have been carrying out numerous studies of RA discourse in terms of the move structures, such as Santos (1996), Samraj (2002, 2005), and Lorés (2004).

A move in genre analysis is defined as a "discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse" (Swales, 2004, p. 228-9). Pho (2009) indicated, "each move has its own communicative purpose, which, together with other moves, contributes to the general communicative purpose of the text" (p. 17). Each rhetorical move can be realized by one or more steps, but not all moves comprise constituent steps (Samraj, 2009). Both moves and steps are functional units, and can be optional or obligatory in a genre. Those moves or steps occurring regularly in a genre are considered obligatory; others occurring less frequently are considered optional. However, the criteria for defining an obligatory unit are not consistent.

The identification of moves is a crucial step in a rhetorical structure analysis. Swales (2004) indicated that the identification of moves, and consequently the setting of move boundaries, is established by “a mixed bag of criteria” (Swales, 2004, p. 229). Researchers have also turned to linguistic features to help them identify moves and their boundaries. The analyses of micro-level features of RAs have been the subject of many genre studies (Lim, 2006; Pho, 2008).

Genre analysis of RA sections

The RA is one of the most widely researched genres in academic writing. Within the studies examining the organizational patterns of RA sections, the main focus of interest has been on the introduction section of RAs. As early as in 1981, Swales analyzed the structure of RA introduction across a range of fields, and claimed that there was a basic four-move structure in the RA introduction: 1. Establishing the research field, 2. Reporting previous research, 3. Preparing for present research, and 4. Introducing present research. In 1990, Swales revised the structure to a three-move pattern, called the create-a-research-space model (CARS model): 1. Establishing a territory, 2. Establishing a niche, and 3. Occupying the niche. Each of these moves has steps in order to represent the main moves of Introduction section of RA. In Establishing a niche, the writer sets the scene, introduces the study, and reviews the previous studies; then, in the second move, he indicates the gap; and in the third move (Occupying the niche), he announces his own study.

The Method section is the most straightforward part of the RA, but it has gained the least attention from genre analysts. Lim (2006) conducted a detailed move-step analysis on the method section of business management RAs in order to demonstrate how the linguistic features relate to the writer’s communicative intentions and how the linguistic choices fulfill these intentions. He identified one move “preview the results”, which has never been mentioned in other analyses of the Method section of RAs (Brett, 1994).

There have been several studies on the Result and Discussion sections (e.g., Yang and Allison (2003). Holmes (2001) conducted a cross-linguistic analysis on RA discussion section on agricultural economics. He pointed out

that cultural variations had influence on the sequence of the moves. Yang and Allison (2003) examined applied linguistics RAs. They identified specific organizational choices within the sections of Results, Results and Discussion, Discussion, Conclusion, and Pedagogical Implications. They found there were primary moves in the sections, and also some overlapping moves between sections.

Genre analysis of RA abstract

Millions of RAs are being published around the research world every year, and abstracts have become a crucial element to help readers make a decision in selecting readings. Lorés (2004) has stated that RA abstracts are different from RAs in the following three aspects: function, rhetorical structure and linguistic realizations.

Because of the increasing interest in abstracts, quite a few analyses on the part-genre have been conducted (Lorés, 2004; Pho, 2008; Samraj, 2005; Santos, 1996; Von Bonn & Swales, 2007). Santos (1996) analyzed 94 abstracts and proposed a five-move pattern: (1) *Situating the research*, (2) *Presenting the research*, (3) *Describing the methodology*, (4) *Summarizing the results*, and (5) *Discussing the research*. Among the 94 abstracts examined, it was found that almost all abstracts contained Move 2 and Move 3, about 80% included Move 4, about 53% had Move 5, and only 43% included Move 1. The results may suggest that Moves 2, 3, and 4 are obligatory moves in applied linguistics abstracts.

Based on Santos's (1996) model, Pho (2008) analyzed the move structure of 30 abstracts, 20 in the field of applied linguistics, and 10 in educational technology. The results revealed that all 20 applied linguistics abstracts included Moves 2, 3, and 4, 80% of the abstracts contained Move 5, and only 45% had Move 1. The remaining 10 abstracts in educational technology also showed a similar pattern, with Moves 2, 3, and 4 as obligatory moves. Pho's (2008) results were generally in line with Santos (1996). However, since Pho's (2008) study involved only 20 abstracts in applied linguistics, a study with a larger number of samples is needed if we want to have a clear, up-to-date picture of the overall move structure of abstracts in applied linguistics.

Swales (1981) claims that there is a four-move structure in the research article: Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion (IMRD). This move structure is replicated in abstracts according to other researchers (Salager-Meyer, 1992; Bhatia, 1993; Martin, 2003; Lores, 2004; Samraj, 2004). Swales (1990) later adapted his research article introduction move structure to accommodate social science, which he claims is different from experimental research due to the field's focus on literature review rather than research methods. Swales offers instead the rhetorical pattern of a create-a-research-space structure, which has only three moves but, which in his view, can still represent the different genres of research article Introduction.

Bhatia (1993), however, researching research article abstracts (RAAs), confirms Swales' earlier 1981 model by arguing that RAAs, which reflect the organization of the research article itself, should have four moves: Purpose, Method, Results and Conclusion (PMRC). Samraj (2004) and Lores (2004) found most abstracts they analyzed fitted Swales' (1981) IMRD model with only a small portion revealing the CARS model. Different again, Hyland (2000) separated the writer's statement of research purpose from the introduction move, categorizing abstracts into five moves: introduction, purpose, method, product and conclusion.

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 & Mobasher, 2007; Keshavarz & Atai, 2007; Marefat & Mohammadzadeh, 2013) and micro levels of analysis (Jalilifar, 2007; Atai & Sadr, 2008).

Transitivity System

Transitivity analysis was also conducted to examine the data at a more micro level. The framework for analysis of transitivity system is mainly provided by Systematic Functional Linguistics. Transitivity has been extensively studied in stylistic and critical linguistics (Kennedy, 1991; Simpson, 1993; Halliday, 1994; Stubbs, 1996) and also in scientific discourse. Eggins (1994), based on Halliday's work (1994), claims that transitivity provides alternative syntactic resources for the representation of participants. Halliday (1994) identified three forms of presentation of

experience: the “outer” experience, represented as actions or events; the “inner” experience, represented as reactions and reflection on the outer experience; and generalization”, represented as a relationship of one form of experience to another. Halliday (1994) believed that these forms of representation can be mainly realized in material processes (e.g., measure, store, use); mental processes (e.g., believe, expect, understand), relational processes (e.g., be, result), verbal processes (e.g., argue, describe, explain, propose, report), existential processes (e.g., appear, be, exist, occur), and behavioral processes (e.g., gaze, look at, smile). Within the transitivity system, each process belonging to specific type exhibits a consistent grammatical behavior in terms of participants, relations, and related structures.

Material processes usually describe concrete, tangible actions. In these processes a participant, the Actor performs some action, on some participant, the goal. These participants can be animate, inanimate or abstract entities as in example below. All the examples are taken from Martinez (2001, p. 4-5).

Actor	Pr: Material	Goal	Circumstance
I	measured	snow shoe hare reproduction	on four 36-ha study girls and juvenile survival.... (O’ Donoghue, 1994)

Mental processes represent feelings, thoughts and perceptions and mainly involve two participants. One participant, the Senser, is endowed with consciousness and thus feels, thinks or perceives. The other, the Phenomenon, may be realized as a thing or as a fact, as in the example below:

Senser	Pr: Mental	Phenomenon
Dezfulian and Bartlett	found	that C botulium A and B spores failed to germinate and grow after a gamma radiation dose of 3 kGy.
(Thayer, Boyd & Huhtanen, 1995)		

Behavioral processes are between material and mental processes. They represent actions that have to be experiences by a conscious being. This type of process doesn't seem to be prominent in language of science.

Verbal processes represent verbal actions. They involve three participants: the Sayer, the Receiver and the Verbiage. The Sayer, the participant responsible for the verbal process is not necessarily conscious; the Receiver is the participant to whom the saying is directed, and the Verbiage is realized by nouns expressing verbal behavior as in the following example:

Sayer	Pr: Verbal	Verbiage
Hughes and Patterson (11)	reported	that yeast, Maraxella and Acientobacter spp dominated the microflora of chicken skin following dose of 2.5 kGy.
(Thayer et al., 1995)		

Relational processes serve to establish a relation between two separate entities: Attribution and identification. The participants, Carrier and Attribute and Type and Token, are distinguished by their potential for reversibility. The Carrier and the Attribute are in a relation of attribution and are not reversible, while the Type and the Token are in a relation of identification and are reversible, as illustrated below:

Carrier	Pr: Relational	Attribute
The effect of time	was	significant (Lewis & Meyers, 1994)

Type	Pr: Relational	Token
The effective pulse width	is	the width of the pulse at the corona onset voltage... (Sidney, Clements & Williams, 1995)

Existential processes represent existence or happening through a process and a participant that is being said to exist, the Existent. These processes usually involve the use of *there* with no representational function. There are no human participants in existential and relational processes, as in the following example:

Pr: Existential		Existent
There	were	fewer than 10 CFU/ g of <i>S. enteritidis</i> in samples irradiated to 3.0 kGy. (Thayer et al., 1995)

Some processes may be classified under more than one type depending on their use in the text. Verbs like *suggest* and *indicate* can be categorized as relational processes when the nominal elements in the transitivity structure are abstractions, or as mental process when the meaning of the verb is “make us think that” (Halliday & Martin, 1993). It seems that transitivity system analysis has not attracted researchers’ interests as move analysis has.

Huang (2009) is among researchers who took a micro structural approach to genre analysis of research articles. She focused on the use of transitivity system of Halliday’s (1991) model in a corpus of 64 research articles written by Chinese and international scholars in applied linguistics field. She found that Chinese writers use transitivity processes differently from international writers.

This study, drawing on Swales’s (1980- 1990) model and Halliday’s (1994) transitivity system, set out to identify and compare the frequency and distribution of moves in RAAs published in Tabriz and Oxford Applied Linguistics journals in English, to explain the use of key aspects of language in each move, and to contribute to a currently small but influential area of work. The move analysis and the transitivity are expected to provide useful information for international linguists and Iranian TESOL practitioners on typical features of TESOL RAAs. Therefore, the main purpose of the study was to compare the research articles published by two universities in terms of move analysis and transitivity system.

Method

Corpus

A total of 148 abstracts were analyzed in this study. The corpus in ALJT consisted of 74 abstracts written by Persian native speakers from 2008 to 2012 and 74 abstracts published by Oxford University from 2004 to 2008. Since ALJO publishes different kinds of articles, such as forum, review papers, and critiques, this study sought to select RAAs in both sets and exclude review papers or critiques.

Procedure

The analysis of the data was carried out in two main stages. At macro level analysis the IMRD model of Swales (1981- 1990) for abstracts was used as the basis of analysis and at the micro-level analysis Halliday's transitivity system was used for each move.

Table 1

Combination Model for Research Article Abstracts Analysis

Macro analysis	Micro analysis
Move 1: Introducing purposes	1. Transitivity system
1.1 indicating the purpose of this Research	1. mental
	2. material
	3. verbal
	4. relational
	5. behavioral
	6. existential
Move 2: Showing methodology	
2.1. showing the methods used	
2.2. showing the scope of research or the previous relevant literature (optional)	
Move 3: Describing results	
3.1 showing or summarizing the most important findings in the research	
Move 4: Drawing conclusions	
4.1 making suggestions	
4.2 implications for doing further research (optional)	

Developed from Swales' (1981, 1990) work and Halliday's (1994) work

Sample analysis

Move Analysis

An instance of the move analysis of an English abstract published in ALJT is presented below. In the first stage, the abstract was inspected to find out whether it manifested the four moves of I, M, R, D. It was found that all four moves existed in it:

Move 1. Introduction

This study aspires to examine the concept of ellipsis by comparing and contrasting English and Persian written texts.

Move 2. Method

For this purpose, three Persian and three English ones were selected. These novels were analyzed carefully; they were compared and contrasted for....

Move 3. Results

The results of the data analysis revealed that various types of ellipsis were used differently in these two languages, In other words, in the

Move 4. Discussion

This study might have implications for teachers, material developers, and researchers in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. In other words, teaching ellipsis....

(The Journal of Applied Linguistics of Tabriz, 1, 2, 2008)

Transitivity Analysis

Transitivity is demonstrated by the kind of process used at move level (Halliday, 1994; Eggins, 1994). In this study, the process types were compared, and percentages for each process type per move were calculated in both sets.

Sample analysis

Move1.

The study reported in this paper is an investigation of the nature of speaking proficiency in English as a second language...

Move2.

Spoken test performances representing five different tasks and five different proficiency levels were analyzed using a range of measures of grammatical accuracy and complexity.....

Move3.

The results showed that features from each category helped distinguish overall levels of performance....

Move4.

The study has implications for methodological issues of ...

(Applied Linguistics, 29, 1. 24-49, 2008)

Results

This section first presents the findings from the move analysis and then those of the transitivity analyses.

MOVE analysis

Analysis in move 1:

Table 2 summarizes the results of the move comparison for both sets of RAAs based on Swales' (1981, 1990) rhetorical structure.

Table 2

Frequency of Moves in Applied Linguistics Journal of Tabriz (ALJT) and Applied linguistics Journal of Oxford (ALJO)

Applied Linguistics	Journal of Tabriz	Applied Linguistics Journal of Oxford
Move1. (I)	74 (100%)	74 (100%)
Move2. (M)	73 (99%)	69 (93%)
Move3. (R)	67 (90%)	57 (77%)
Move4. (D)	42 (57%)	42 (57%)

As Table 2 shows that the distribution of Move 1 is not varied, although there was a discrepancy in the frequency and distribution of Move 1.2,

confirming the importance of stating the purpose of an article in abstract writing.

However, in the Applied Linguistics Journal of Tabriz (ALJT) set, 51.35% of RAAs contained move 1, while only 43.24.6% of RAAs in the Applied Linguistics Journal of Oxford (ALJO) set did so. This implies that ALJT authors liked to begin with more background information than authors in the ALJO set, some of whom omitted it or wrote less on it.

Analysis in Move 2:

Although the percentage in ALJT RAAs was still higher than in the ALJO set, the difference was much smaller (see Table 2): 99% in the Tabriz set, 93% in the Oxford set. This suggests that the Persian authors highly valued literature review as a form of research.

Analysis in Move 3:

As Table 2 suggests, the abstracts of ALJT make use of the R section with 67% more than ALJO abstracts with 57%.

Analysis in Move 4:

Move 4 has two possible forms: giving implications or suggestions. The percentage of this move in both the Oxford and Tabriz sets was much lower than with the first three moves: Specifically, the percentage for the Oxford and Tabriz set was 57%. Both journals make use of the D section significantly less than the model predicts.

With regard to Table 2 above, it can be concluded that there is no difference among the groups in the incorporation of the IMRD moves into their abstracts. All groups employed I almost all the time and D to a low degree, but there are differences in the extent to which each group employs R and M.

Clearly, move structure influences how information can be provided in a text. Transitivity analysis of moves can help explain how language functions at move level.

Transitivity system analysis

Research articles published in JALT:

All ranking clauses (n= 257) were analyzed for types of processes. The percentages of the different types of processes were as follows: material processes 83% (the most frequent); mental processes 43%; verbal processes, 40%; relational processes, 35%; existential processes, 3.50%; and behavioral processes, 1.03%. Behavioral processes were excluded from the statistical analysis due to their low percentage of occurrences.

Research articles published in OALJ:

All ranking clauses (n=211) were analyzed for types of processes. Of the different types of processes, material process were the most frequent (76%), and relational processes were next (68%). The other processes occurred less frequently: verbal: (34%), mental: (10%) and existential: (10%). Behavioral processes were excluded from the statistical analysis due to their low percentage of occurrences.

Table3

Frequency of Transitivity Systems in Applied Linguistic Journal of Tabriz and Applied Linguistic of Oxford

	Applied Linguistics Journal of Tabriz				Applied Linguistics Journal of Oxford			
	I	M	R	D	I	M	R	D
Mental	42(43.29%)	4(6.06%)	10(17.54%)	3 (8%)	6 (8.33%)	2(4%)	6(10%)	4(9%)
Material	41(42.26%)	55(83%)	4(7%)	5(13.51%)	33(46%)	41(76%)	4(7%)	3(7%)
Relational	6(6.18%)	4(6.06%)	34(60%)	13(35%)	8(11%)	5(9.26%)	41(68%)	18(40%)
Verbal	6(6.18%)	1(1.51%)	7(12%)	15(40.54%)	25(35%)	6(11%)	9(15%)	15(33%)
Existential	1(1.03%)	2(3.03%)	2(3.50%)	1(2.70%)	0	0	0	0

It can be concluded that mental process stands first with 43% in move1; material process stands first with 83% in move 2; relational process with 60% comes first in move3, and verbal process stands first with 40.54% in move4 in ALJT. However, in ALJO, material process comes first in move1 and 2 with 46% and 76%, relational processes with 68% in move3 and verbal process stands first with 33% in move 4.

The INTRODUCTION contained the highest percentage of mental and material processes in RAA in Azad University of Tabriz. However; in the

Oxford RA journal, this section contained the highest percentage of material and verbal processes.

The METHOD section of the research article appeared to be the most ‘actional’ part of the RA. It was dominated by material processes, with very low percentage of verbal, mental, and relational processes in both sets. This is an indication that deliberation and reflection aren’t present in this section.

The RESULT section was dominated by relational and mental in Tabriz corpus; however, in Oxford corpus this section was dominated by relational and verbal processes.

The DISCUSSION section was dominated by verbal and relational processes in Tabriz RA set and Oxford RA set.

Discussion

The previous two sections presented the analysis of the move and transitivity structure of two sets of RAAs from the journals of ALJT and ALJO, which suggested that the abstracts tended to follow relatively similar generic structures, that is, the RAAs in both journal sets tend to correspond with the combined model based on Swales’ (1981, 1990) rhetorical structure.

There were linguistic differences, however and these differences may be explained due to cultural reasons. This study accorded with the claim that the Iranian TESOL practitioners’ academic writing tended to be inductive (Brick, 2006). This was evident in Move 1 in the ALJT set, in which the RAAs had a higher proportion of background moves (Move 1.1, 53%; Table 2), while the ALJO RAAs had only 29.6% for Move 1.1. This long introduction move may be due to the tendency of Iranian authors to write more indirectly than directly (Brick, 2006). This practice at least partly explains why Iranian writers have been described as using less argumentation than western writers. The processes in the different moves provided further evidence for this difference. Table 3 shows that different processes were used more in the Iranian set than in those in the international set (see percentages for the different processes in Table 3). This might be that in writing up the abstract, the Iranian research authors are likely to

focus more on background information and the implication of their studies than on the methodology and the actual findings of their research.

This study is generally in line with the findings of Samraj (2004) and Lores (2004)'s studies, as most abstracts they analyzed fitted Swales' (1981) IMRD model. The results may suggest that Moves 1, 2, and 3 are obligatory moves in applied linguistics abstracts based on IMRD model. However, Santos (1996) proposed a five-move pattern: (1) *Situating the research*, (2) *Presenting the research*, (3) Describing the methodology, (4) Summarizing the results, and (5) Discussing the research, concluding that Moves 2, 3, and 4 are obligatory moves in applied linguistics abstracts.

Conclusion

This study conducted move, transitivity analyses of 148 research articles published in Islamic Azad University of Tabriz and Oxford University written in English. The four structural moves of Swales' model were evident in both abstract sets but were differently distributed, for example, the background information in the Tabriz RAAs tended to be longer than that in the Oxford RAAs.

However, the differences are sufficient to suggest implications for Iranian TESOL scholars who wish to publish in English-medium journals. Besides theoretical implications, this study has a number of implications for teaching English as a foreign language.

It is generally believed (Martin, 2003) that in order to be accepted within the scientific communities, scholars must be familiar with international generic conventions of their field. Thus, it may be necessary for syllabus designers to develop ESP courses on generic structures in university programs to make sure Persian native speakers are familiar with generic norms of writing.

This research study, besides answering some questions, raises some others which can be dealt with in other studies:

- 1) The researcher focused on RA abstracts written on the subject of *Applied Linguistics*. A similar procedure may be replicated with abstracts written by English and Persian native speakers on other similarly disregarded subjects in order to discover the generic conventions of those disciplines.

- 2) The present study focused on RA abstracts. It is possible that *thesis* abstracts behave in different ways.
- 3) A similar research study can be carried out using models other than those utilized in this study in order to find a better model for describing applied linguistics RA abstracts.
- 4) This study was confined to 148 RA abstracts. A similar study with a larger corpus may lead to more reliable results.

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Biodata

Biok Behnam is Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz brach, Iran. His current research interests cover Discourse Analysis, ELT and Translation Studies. He has been involved in a wide range of projects in the area of Applied Linguistics and Discourse Analysis as a project leader, consultant and researcher. He has widely presented papers to national and international conferences in North America, Australia, Europe, China, India and South East Asia.

Jafa Zamanian is a Ph.D candidate of TEFL. His research interests include Discourse Analysis, intercultural communicative competence and language assessment. He has been practicing his career as an English teacher in Education Organization, and Iran Language Institute for more than a decade. He has published and presented some papers and books at national and international conferences.