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Move structure of scientific research abstracts: CARS vs. IMRAD

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Abstract

Published guidelines aimed at helping researchers to draft research abstracts tend to draw upon two types of rhetorical and thematic structures, namely the Create-A-Research Space (CARS) model and the IMRAD model. Swales (1990) in his seminal book, *Genre Analysis*, describes the moves and steps in the CARS model for introductions in research articles. This model has since been widely applied to abstracts. The IMRAD model follows the typical organisation pattern of generic research papers, namely introduction, method, results, analysis and discussion.

The aim of this study is to identify whether IMRAD or CARS is a better fit for research abstracts in the domain of information science. A corpus of 100 scientific research abstracts drawn from five different subdomains of information science was created to test the hypothesis. The first twenty abstracts published in 2012 in five highly rated IEEE journals (mean 5-year impact factor ranking of 3.8) were compiled to create a small balanced corpus comprising 17,157 tokens. The move structure in each abstract was manually tagged using the UAM Corpus Tool version. 2.8.14 according to both CARS and IMRD move structures. Expert consultants in each subdomain were used to check the accuracy of the coding.

The preliminary results indicate that the IMRAD model is a better fit, yet there is significant variation in move structure across the subdomains of information science. Pedagogic and research implications of the results will be suggested.

References

Swales, J. 1990. *Genre Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.