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## Discursive Construction of the Significance in English and Turkish Psychology Theses: An Intercultural Rhetorical Analysis (\*)

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**Abstract:** Studies carried out on academic genres have shown that rhetorical actions scholars followed have seemingly varied to the contexts in which context-bound socio-discursive factors override. On this basis, in this paper, the researcher intended to analyse comparatively rhetorical categories in the introductory parts of 30 master thesis written in Turkish and 30 master theses written in English by Turkish researchers, and 30 master theses by native speakers of English in the field of Psychology published between 2015-2020. Move 3 -Occupying the Niche- in Swales CARS Model (2004) was sought within introductory parts in order to explore how authors in the same field but different contexts deal with publicizing the significance and value of their study. The analyses show that, despite small number of differences in frequency between two corpora, Move 3 is equally and frequently operated in introductory parts of psychology master theses by both Turkish academics and native speakers of English. As regards Turkish ones, on the other hand, the especially the frequency of those steps dealing with significance is quite less. These findings indicate that, in discursive construction of the significance in the genre in question, for English texts socio-pragmatic factors, that is motive to be recognized internationally, tend to prevail in the rhetorical choices the writers do while structuring the discursive acts in the texts while for local ones cultural facts are overriding.

**Keywords:** Significance, Psychology Theses, Intercultural Rhetoric, Genre Analysis, Occupying the Niche.

### Psikoloji Alanındaki Yüksek Lisans Tezlerinde Önem Vurgusunun Söylemsel Oluşumu: Bir Kültürlerarası Retorik Analizi

**Öz:** Akademik türler üzerine yapılan çalışmalar, araştırmacıların metinlerinde uyguladıkları retorik eylemlerin bağlam odaklı sosyo-söylemsel etmenlerin baskın olduğu ortamlara göre değişim gösterdiğini ortaya koymuştur. Bu noktadan hareketle, bu çalışmada, yazar 2015-2020 yılları arasında Psikoloji alanında Türk araştırmacılar ile anadili İngilizce olan yabancı araştırmacıların İngilizce yüksek lisans tezlerinin giriş bölümlerini karşıtalsal çözümleme ile incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Swales'in CARS Modelinde(2004) Aşama 3- Alanyazındaki Boşluğu Doldurma-'deki basamaklardan hareketle araştırmacıların tezlerinin giriş bölümlerinde çalışmalarının önem vurgusunu söylemsel olarak nasıl yapılandırıdıklarına yönelik analizler yapılmıştır. Analiz sonuçları, Psikoloji alanındaki Türk araştırmacılar ile anadili İngilizce olan araştırmacıların İngilizce yüksek lisans tezlerinin giriş bölümlerinde Aşama 3'ün küçük frekans farklılıklarına rağmen eşit ve sıklıkla uygulandığını göstermiştir. Fakat Türk araştırmacıların Türkçe tezlerinde Aşama 3'ün özellikle önem vurgusu üzerine olan basamakların sıklığının oldukça düşük olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Bu bulgular ışığında, söz konusu akademik türde önem vurgusunun söylemsel oluşumunda İngilizce tezlerde sosyo-pragmatik faktörlerin, bir diğer ifadeyle uluslararası tanınırlık kazanma yönlendiriminin, Türkçe tezlerde ise kültürel faktörlerin

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yazarların metinlerindeki söylemsel eylemleri yapılandırmada etkili olduğu sonucuna varılabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Önem Vurgusu, Psikoloji Yüksek Lisans Tezleri, Kültürlerarası Retorik, Tür Analizi, Alandaki Boşluğu Doldurma

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### I. Introduction

Promotionally reporting the probable contribution of a research to knowledge and field by emphasizing how others in the fields may benefit from that research is a discursive act that needs to be successfully performed by scholars in their studies. On this basis, seeking for international and local approval, researchers require to work for recognition by the communities in their fields through addressing the details the members in these communities like to see in the texts (Lillis & Curry, 2010). Therefore, the rhetorical strategies, conventionally established, to be adopted in a specific research genre play a vital role in lending the credibility of the research conducted. Especially, the use of persuasive strategies in discursive construction of the significance, in other words, promoting the value of research are becoming crucial (Bhatia, 2005). At this point, persuasive rhetorical strategies can be defined as the discursive acts promotionally operated in affecting the opinions of the target audience about the contribution of the study as a novel one. In the literature, the persuasive rhetoric has been studied with a focus on lexico-grammatical features of the texts such as metadiscourse, evaluation, booster, hedging devices, self-reference..etc. (e.g. Afros & Schryer, 2009; Harwood, 2005a, 2005b; Hyland, 2000, 2005; Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Stoller&Robinson, 2013;). Besides, there are also studies, which have simply analysed the linguistic elements directly pointing out the contribution the study would make to a certain discipline or field as an original work in introductory parts of the studies (Fairclough, 1995; Hyland, 2000; Shehzad, 2010). Moreover, in addition to these meta-discourse analysis studies, researchers have also followed other frameworks, as well.

In Swales CARS model (1981, 1990) and the later updated versions of the model for other academic genres ( Swales, 2004; Soler-Monreal, et al. 2011), the overall salient features of introduction sections are established on the basis of disciplinary variation regarding obligatory, optional, and probable rhetorical acts. At this point, the pragmatic purpose of introduction sections in scientific texts is fixed as to compete for creating a research space (Swales&Feak, 2004, p.243). Thus, the introduction sections require to be constructed by following some certain rhetorical strategies categorised in three moves, which are 1. Establishing a territory by pointing out the focus of the study, 2. Establishing a Niche through the justification of the study, and 3. Occupying the niche by presenting their study about how the study will address the niche established in Move 2. The promotional report of a study is specifically accomplished in the operation of Move 3 through arrangement of linguistic items rhetorically. In this respect, it is essential to point out that the explicit report of the contribution a study would do is among the common features observed in the introduction sections of academic genres in nearly all disciplines.

Using this move and step genre framework of Swales, a number of studies have focused on the rhetorical aspects of academic texts and explored discipline specific structural organization within the run of genre analysis studies ( e.g. Nwogu (1997) in Medicine; Posteguillo (1999) in Computer Science; Yang and Allison (2004) in Applied Linguistics and Kanoksilapatham (2005) in Biochemistry). Particularly, due to the elaborated content , the most frequently analysed sections have been introductions because researchers liked to reveal disciplinary variation and the diversity of rhetorical aspects including the promotional elements. In the literature, regarding mentioning the significance of a study, there has been observed variation across the rhetorical practices of writers to the academic discourse community they belong to. In fact, the disciplinary culture has seemingly affected how writers address the significance of their study in their texts because the expectations also vary to the discipline and even the sub-disciplines of the same discipline (Anthony, 1999; Nwogu, 1997; Samraj, 2002). At this point, the conventions in the discourses apparently organize the discursive interaction to be mediated between writers and target community; therefore, writers generally accommodate their texts to the scientific and rhetorical expectations in the discourses. Accordingly, the findings of the studies following move analysis have pointed out that, while in some certain disciplines writers are much more frequently engaging in promoting their work by densely stressing out the potential value the study has for the field, promotional strategies are covered less commonly in the texts of other fields ( Berkenkotter& Huckin, 1995; Hyland, 2000; Melander, Swales& Frederickson, 1997; Ozturk, 2007; Lin& Evans, 2012; Samraj, 2002, 2005,2013).

For scholars, who make effort to use English for their academic purposes, it is of importance to organize their academic genres to the scientific presuppositions of the international target discourse communities in their disciplines. Still, the number of studies focusing on cross-cultural aspects in the texts, including the ones comparing English texts of native and non-natives, by using genre analysis frame has been somewhat limited despite an increase in the last years (Loi, 2010; Taylor & Chen, 1991; Duszak, 1994; Fredrickson & Swales, 1994; Ahmad, 1997; Adnan, 2008; Hirano, 2009; Burgess, 2002; Mur Dueñas, 2010); what is more, their focal point is generally research papers. These cross cultural studies have concluded that cultural and pragmatic points in the contexts, where genres are produced, obviously shape the socio-discursive acts researchers follow. Indeed, it is commonly seen that, in some languages, texts are lack of the rhetoric addressing the significance, but on the other hand writers heavily emphasize the potential of their study in English texts. Yet, the rhetorical step ( “stating the value of the present research”) in revised version of Swales CARS model (2004) has been rarely analysed in these studies.

Thus, in this paper, the researcher attempts to expand genre analytic research by exploring cross-cultural rhetorical variation by comparatively examining the prevalent rhetorical practices of English-speaking scholars and Turkish scholars in the introduction sections of English master theses in the disciplines in one of the Health Sciences fields, Psychology. Specifically, Move 3 in Swales CARS model revised version (2004) was focused to analyse how writers present their study with a special focus on the steps, ‘

*announcing principal outcomes*' and *'stating the value of the present research'*, which address the effort of writers in promoting the value of their research as a novel contribution.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of why writers should care the discursive construction of the significance as a socio-pragmatic act in the introductory parts of their theses. In this sense, the study is of value for EAP writers with regard to its pedagogical implications: the writers should be informed about the key and the pragmatic role the rhetorical strategies emphasizing the significance of the study has in recognition by the target community and be motivated to frequently operate relevant rhetorical acts in the discursive construction of their texts.

## II. Methodology

### A. Data source

A total of 90 master theses written in one of the Health Sciences fields, Psychology, in English were compiled for the analysis of this study. The theses were selected over a period of five years (2015–2020). At this point, it is essential to point out that Psychology covers a number of sub-disciplines; therefore, in the selection of the corpus, the researcher eliminated the theses based on review and just involved the ones following empirical investigation, randomly and purposefully. The corpora of English and Turkish theses by Turkish authors were retrieved from Council of Higher Education Thesis Center while the corpus by native speakers of English was compiled from ProQuest Database ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global by caring the comparable corpora criteria (Connor, 2002).

In corpus compilation process, despite special focus on selecting the texts by trying to control the variation across subdisciplines of Psychology for comparable corpora, still it is necessary to identify that, due to the contextual variables (see Connor & Moreno, 2005), such as expectations of the academic discourse communities in the contexts - institute or college- they are produced in, there may be nuances in rhetorical choices more or less, even though the socio-pragmatic and socio-discursive function of the thesis genre is the same. Yet, as the researcher is aware of the fact that these extraneous factors may threaten the internal validity of the study, not only were randomized selection followed, but also the researcher worked with the experts in the field during corpus compilation. Thus, while, through randomized sampling, the researcher bias was reduced, through expert opinions the internal validity was, to certain extent, established (Creswell, 2005; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012)

### B. Genre Analysis Framework: Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

**Table 1.** Move 3- Occupying the Niche- in Swales CARS Model (2004)

<b>Move 3</b>	<b><i>Occupying the Niche</i></b>
Step 1	Announcing present research (descriptively and/or purposively)
Step 2	Presenting research questions or hypotheses
Step 3	Announcing principal outcomes
Step 4	Stating the value of present research
Step 5	Outlining the structure of the thesis

In order to compare the rhetorical acts performed in the introductory parts of master theses in an attempt to explore how writers construct the discursive acts in reporting the contribution or significance of their study in Psychology discipline, the researcher has used the revised version of move analysis framework by Swales (2004). In this framework, Swales described the rhetorical features, covering grammatical and lexical units, mapped into patterns called as 'move' in a specific academic genre. Thus, the texts in genres cover some certain linguistic units- called as steps- in moves that are structured to accomplish determined rhetorical goals. Generally, these moves are displayed in sequences through the one or more steps manifested. Then, moves and steps indicate segments in text and rhetorical acts performed to accomplish the discursive goal of these segments, that is, moves. This study was specifically grounded on Move 3 – *Occupying the Niche*- in the model. In realising the function of this move, there are 5 steps, some of which are commonly expected to be operated in the fields. In the model, the steps termed are respectively; Step 1. Announcing present research descriptively and/or purposively, Step 2. Presenting research questions or hypotheses, Step 3. Announcing principal outcomes, Step 4. Stating the value of present research, and Step 5. Outlining the structure of the paper.

As regards data collection, two coders, one of whom is the author of the study and the other is an expert in the field of Psychology, coded the introductory parts of the theses on the basis of the model. In this first phase, the complete agreement was not reached, so the author and the expert discussed on the issues and the points in the model, on which there were discrepancies. Then, the author and expert again started to code the texts independently once again; at the end of this second phase, the agreement percentage was 72.06%. In this process, the lexical and syntactical features were scrutinized as signs of steps because in the literature it is emphasized that a focus on lexical items is useful in the identification of steps (e.g. Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Nwogu, 1997). Accordingly, despite a certain degree of subjectivity in the analysis, the researcher did her best to keep the bias to a minimum. Besides, there are also some methodological limitations due to a pure focus on textual features that further studies should address in the study of genre analyses. In this regard, genre based issues should be studied through more comprehensive studies by following several data collection techniques (interviews, observations, scale etc.) and designs such as case studies, ethnographic research or mixed paradigms that will allow data mining in terms of social, cultural, and contextual aspects affecting rhetoric-pragmatic features in genres.

Finally, as for the statistical data analysis, a multivariate analysis was applied in which *p*- value was computed in order to estimate the significance level for the differences in frequency distribution between English and local texts through IBM SPSS 21 programme.

### **III. Findings and Discussion**

The analyses showed some degree of variation in the frequency and distribution of some of steps in Move 3 operated in the introductory parts of the theses in two languages. As it is seen in Table 3, the only step, which occurred in all the introductions analysed, is

Step 1 – *Announcing present research* – generally through purpose statement rather than research description. In this regard, this finding is in line with the findings of many other studies in the literature focusing on academic genres in different fields from different languages and contexts ( e.g. Adnan, 2008; Ahmad, 1997; Burgess, 2002; Fakhri, 2004; Hirano, 2009; Loi, 2010). Due to the descriptive nature of this rhetorical category, Step 1 is widely accepted as an obligatory function to be performed in the introductions in the disciplines and languages. Hence, the common use of Step 1 in the corpora focused in this study shows that scholars employ this rhetorical strategy in order to give some certain details of their study.

On the other hand, the least frequent step observed in the theses is Step 5 in each language, which suggests that *Outlining the structure of thesis* in introductory parts is not among the frequently preferred rhetorical strategy in Psychology. In the studies, it is generally pointed out that the frequency of Step 5 is quite few in Health Sciences introductions including Psychology field compared to Humanities/Social Sciences introductions (e.g. Nwogu, 1997; Posteguillo, 1999; Martin & Perez, 2014) . In this respect, researchers emphasize the fact that authors in Humanities/Social Sciences customarily prefer to highlight the content of their text through more reader friendly rhetoric, which is also believed to enhance the credibility of their study, but as for Health Sciences there is a lack observed in the use of this rhetorical strategy (Martin & Perez, 2014). The scarcity of Step 5 in the corpora analysed in this study obviously confirm the findings of this previous research. Besides, especially for Turkish corpus, the other important factor in this absence might be cultural choices in the sort of communicative acts to be operated in the texts. In Turkish context, in the structure of theses' introductions in Health Sciences, it is nearly rare to see a part addressing to the content of the study, which may be the result of academic socio-cultural motives in the Turkish context. Additionally, another key point about the outlining the structure of thesis is that, in Swales model (2004), this step is viewed as optional one because of the probability in the fields, so, for Psychology field, Step 5 seems unlikely in the academic texts.

**Tablo 2.** Frequency and distribution of Move 3 steps across Psychology theses' introductions in Turkish corpus, English corpus by Turkish authors, and English corpus by native speakers

	No. Tur. Cor. (%)	No. Eng. Cor by Tur. Sch. (%)	No. Eng. Cor by Eng. Sch. (%)
Step 1 ( Announcing present research descriptively and/or purposively)	30 (100 %)	30 (100%)	30 (100 %)
Step 2 ( Presenting research questions or hypotheses)	21 (70 %)	24 (80%)	29 (96,6 %)
Step 3 ( Announcing principal outcomes)	2 (6,6%)	15 (50 %)	21 (70 %)
Step 4 ( Stating the value of present research)	6 (20 %)	22 (73,3 %)	27 (90 %)

Step 5 (Outlining the structure of the thesis)	4 (13,3 %)	7 (23,3 %)	11 (36,6 %)
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Conversely, despite small number of differences across three corpora, *Presenting research questions or hypotheses* is the second most frequent rhetorical category operated in two languages. Still, as seen in Table 2, it seems that Step 2 (*Presenting research questions or hypothesis*) is much more common in the English Psychology theses (96,6%) than in the rest of the corpora. In the literature, it is reported that the occurrence of this step may show variation to the disciplines and languages (e.g. Nwogu, 1997; Samraj, 2002; Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Yang & Allison, 2004; Afros & Schryer, 2009; Loi, 2010; Mur Dueñas, 2010); in some fields such as Applied Linguistics, this step is performed by presenting research questions, whereas in other fields especially based on experimentation presenting hypotheses is quite common. In this paper, the corpora studied are based on empirical investigation through either qualitative or quantitative or mixed paradigms, so it is natural to find out research questions or hypotheses or both of them at the same time. Consequently, the frequency of Step 2 in this study suggests that the research designs followed may be an important factor in presenting research questions or hypotheses. But, this finding requires to be validated with a focus on larger corpus including texts from other languages in the field. Besides, although this finding of the study is in line with the findings of some studies in terms of the disciplinary variation especially with respect to experimentation based disciplines (for example Samraj, 2002), this must also be re-handled for more valid results.

As for the steps mainly dealing with construction of significance of the study, concerning Step 3 (*Announcing principal outcomes*), there is a rhetorical variation across three corpora in terms of the incidence of occurrence. The lowest number of frequency was reported in Turkish corpus while the highest one was coded in English corpus by native speakers of English. One interesting point in these findings is that, in the introductions of English theses by Turkish authors, the occurrence of *Announcing principal outcomes* is quite common compared to these parts of Turkish theses. Respecting the lexical and syntactical features, Turkish authors of English corpus were observed to mostly use suppressive or passive voice, whereas English corpus by native speakers of English generally covered active cases. In Psychology field, it appears that there is a language based so cross-cultural variation in announcing principal outcomes, which may suggest that international norms force authors to use discursive strategies allowing for persuasion about the value of their study. In English texts, especially in some certain fields of Experimental and Health Sciences, the findings of the previous studies in the literature are in accordance with the finding of the current study (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Posteguillo, 1999; Swales & Feak, 2004; Shehzad, 2010)

As to the another rhetorical strategy pertaining to promoting the contribution of the research, Step 4 (*Stating the value of the present research*) is the central category directly referring to the various discursive choices for open emphasis on the value of the study for the relevant discourse community. Generally, the authors, underlining the value, prefer to use the lexis such as novel, original, important etc. as common strategies to make the contribution of their work visible for all stakeholders in their discipline. Here, it must be

noted that Step 4 is the subsidiary detail that authors highlight through Step 1A (*Counter claiming*) or Step 1B (*Indicating a gap*) or Step 1D (*Continuing a tradition*) in Move 2 and Step 1 (*Announcing present research*) in Move 3. Considering the rates of occurrence of Step 4 in the three corpora on this basis, authors of English theses seemingly much more tend to compete for recognition by enhancing the value of their study through rhetorical choices they do. Yet, in Turkish corpus, the frequency of value statement is quite few. Step 4 is another communicative act in the model, the incidence of which markedly differs from discipline to discipline and shows cross-cultural variation (see, for example, Anthony, 1999; Mur Dueñas, 2010; Shehzad, 2010; Martin & Perez, 2014); in some disciplines such as some sub-fields of Engineering, *stating the value of the present research* has been observed commonly in the genres, while in other disciplines the inclusion of this step is not prevalent (e.g. Business Management in Mur Dueñas). In this paper, the findings point out a sort of cross-cultural variation due to the significant difference across languages. However, there is still a need for further studies about how authors arrange the linguistic acts in the academic genres persuasively in promoting the value of their research.

The comparative quantitative analysis of corpora, as seen in Table 3 and 4, showed that the frequency of Step 3 (*Announcing principal outcomes*) and the frequency of Step 4 (*Stating the value of the present research*) were significantly higher in the English corpora. Thus, in the field of Psychology, English theses present a higher degree of rhetorical strategies betokening the discursive construction of significance than the Turkish ones.

**Table 3.** Frequency and distribution of Move 3 steps in introduction sections of the Turkish and English theses by Turkish authors.

	Turkish theses	English theses by Turkish authors	p -Value
Step 1	30 (100 %)	30 (100%)	1
Step 2	21 (70 %)	24 (80%)	0.105
Step 3	2 (6,6%)*	15 (50 %)*	0.000
Step 4	6 (20 %)*	22 (73,3 %)*	0.000
Step 5	4 (13,3 %)	7 (23,3 %)	0.105

Significance difference between two proportions ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) is indicated by an asterisk (\*).

**Table 4.** Frequency and distribution of Move 3 steps in the introduction sections of the Turkish theses by Turkish and English theses by native speakers of English.

	Turkish theses	English theses by native speakers	p -Value
Step 1	30 (100 %)	30 (100 %)	1
Step 2	21 (70 %)*	29 (96,6 %)*	0.003
Step 3	2 (6,6%)*	21 (70 %)*	0.000
Step 4	6 (20 %)*	27 (90 %)*	0.000
Step 5	4 (13,3 %)*	11 (36,6 %)*	0.004

Significance difference between two proportions ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) is indicated by an asterisk (\*).

In general, relating the rhetorical strategies followed in the introductions of Psychology theses, English texts not only by native speakers but also by Turkish authors are much more elaborate and complex than Turkish ones. Accordingly, English Introductions obviously conform to the international norms in rhetorical choices, but Turkish Introductions vary greatly, which may indicate that structural patterns in theses are shaped by the cultural norms affecting the expectations of discourse communities. At this point, in English texts authors apparently care to follow the rhetorical structure in their thesis having close affinity with Swales (2004) model, while, probably due to the socio-pragmatic norms of discourse community of Psychology discipline in Turkish academic context, authors mostly structure the introductory parts to the expectations of local discourse.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The findings of the current study have showed that, in the discursive construction of significance in the field of Psychology, the introductions of English theses by native speakers and Turkish authors promotionally cover many more persuasive rhetorical strategies than the introductions of Turkish theses by Turkish authors. Specifically, the incidence of Step 3 (*Announcing principal outcomes*) and Step 4 (*Stating the value of present research*), as two rhetorical acts directly linking to promoting the contribution, is higher in the English texts than than in those written in Turkish.

With respect to the significant difference across two languages and, especially, the difference between English and Turkish corpus by Turkish authors, rather than disciplinary norms, the expectations of local and international discourses, to certain extent, direct the rhetoric-pragmatic practices and the strategies authors follow in their genres. Indeed, the discursive content in English texts functionally refers to a much more competitive voice to be recognized in international realms. On the other hand, Turkish texts noticeably lack this sort of rhetorical aspects. Another point that this study puts is the factor of *methodology* followed in the theses; it appears that to be an empirical investigation or not may affect the rhetorical choices authors do. Nevertheless, this point should be addressed through well-rounded studies for more valid results. All in all, in the Psychology theses written in Turkish, national cultural factors seem to override in the promotional strategies performed, but, in English theses, the international conventions are evidently dominant.

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