# Comparative Analysis of Discussion Sections of Ph.D. Dissertations across Cultures: Rhetorical Moves in Focus

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## Abstract

There is a growing recognition of the need to understand and support the distinctive linguistic and cultural needs of doctoral students from backgrounds other than English speaking, particularly in their writing lives. Bearing this fact in mind, the present study explored the discussion sections of Ph.D. dissertations written within diverse linguistic and cultural settings, relating to the use of rhetorical moves. The genres for analysis involved EFL, ESL, and native English–speaking settings in Iran and India, respectively, and English-speaking countries, namely the UK and USA. Based on a purposive sampling method, 300 dissertations were analyzed. This research took up a descriptive design to develop patterns and differences in the discourse structures across the contexts studied. The researcher used Yang and Allison's framework, 2003 to answer the research questions. All data were analyzed using SPSS version 21, and the data results were compared using Chi-Square data analysis. All results showed that native speakers employed more rhetorical moves proportionally than the other two groups, but this was not significantly statistically different. These findings have implications for researchers, teachers, and students.

**INTRODUCTION**

Intercultural competence has long formed a central theme in the discussion on global citizenship as an educational attribute. The concept of the multicultural speaker has formed one of the building blocks for many new conceptualizations thought out by scholars, among others Helm & Guth 2010, Hoff 2020, Porto 2013, and Ros i Solé 2013. Thus, for some scholars, culture of the country can be homogeneous, consistent, and representative of predefined values and beliefs; however, the identity of an individual and how others view him or her is context-dependent and changes with the situation and setting, as prescribed by Dervin 2016; Van Maele & Messelink 2019. The truth is that variety in nuanced interaction is done according to various identity markers apart from nationality, such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, race itself, social class, schooling, partisan, and professional affiliation, which should be a starting point in any attempt to understand cross-cultural interactions.

Culture and language are put together. The status and role of culture in language teaching have long been a puzzle to which teachers have held sharply conflicting opinions while, simultaneously holding conflicting views on what it is, and where it fits into the process. According to Kovacs (2017, p. 73) these differences can be a result of their training, their past experiences as language learners, and their contact with the culture of their target. The degree of cultural differences between the target and native cultures may influence the nature of the cultural lessons given in the language program.

Two focuses of this study are the two relevant areas of corpus-linguistics: the study of EFL-that is, a variety of English spoken in countries such as Iran-and the study of indigenized varieties of English, ESL, spoken in places like India. Traditionally, analysts have approached these two domains separately because EFL and ESL are acquired and used in different contexts. As Gries & Deshors, 2015, p.132 state despite the rapidly growing number of studies attempting to close the gap between EFL and ESL, it is still unclear whether the gap should be closed or not. The importance of English-written dissertations as the primary form of promoting and distributing academic information has expanded due to English's standing as the language of science and technology. Many university students majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT) in EFL contexts share this need, and conducting research and reporting the results in the form of a thesis is a requirement for partially fulfilling master's and doctoral degrees in this discipline. Writing the

explanation of the findings after reporting the results is more difficult for them, despite the fact that for many of them, this is a formidable and tough assignment. Numerous issues noted in this section stem from the writers' imprecise understanding of their own variables, as well as their poor writing abilities and ignorance of academic writing conventions. Learning rhetorical motion structures in academic writing can be challenging for EFL and ESL students. Different linguistic backgrounds, a lack of exposure to scholarly discourse, and insufficient training in the use of rhetorical organization can all contribute to these difficulties (Ariarad & Esfandiari, 2021; Massoum & Yazdanmehr, 2019; Namvar & Ibrahim, 2014). Academic achievement depends heavily on one's capacity to use proper rhetorical devices. Dissertations are an important academic milestone, and EFL and ESL students can produce high-quality academic work by knowing the particular linguistic features that contribute to well-written discussion sections (Alvi et al., 2017; Namvar et al., 2017). Furthermore, because the language they employed in their research publications might not sound natural, these students may have trouble getting them published in reputable journals. In order to give researchers and students in academic contexts academic writing models that reflect the conventions of theses acknowledged by the discourse community, the genre analysis technique in EAP has been encouraged (Soodmand Afshar et al., 2018; Alharbi, 2021).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to its communicative purpose, a genre is classified. A category can be described as "a distinctive grouping of conversation of any type, spoken or written" (Swales, 1990, p.33) that functions as "responses through authors or speakers to the requirements of a social context" (Johns, 2013, p.3). In the discipline of genre analysis, a move-by-move description of a genre's rhetorical structure has been very influential. To create a unit that distinguishes between different types of conversation, topics, claims, and other data are joined together (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). A method known as genre analysis breaks down a text into discrete semantic units known as movements in order to examine the relationship between a specific type of text and its setting. The language used to accomplish particular goals reflects the various communication goals that community members share with each step. A sequence of linguistic decisions referred to as steps can be used to accomplish each motion (Kanoksilapatham, 2015, p.76). The arrangement of the movements indicates the rhetorical discourse's structural patterns and their order according to the author's communication objectives. Move is a rhetorical device that can be realized formally or

verbally in the form of one or more steps. It has a functional purpose in communication and social interaction (Jalilifar, 2009, p.19). One of the first to do so was Swales (1981, 1990), who performed a step-by-step analysis of the RA introductions' structure. After that, a great deal of research has been done on various research articles and thesis sections concerning move structures. Some of these studies include those by Bian (2023), Bonsu & Afful (2022), Hidayat & Herniawati (2023), Jalilifar et al. (2012), Shirani & Chalak (2016), Soodmand Afshar et al. (2018), and many more.

Amnuai and Wannaruk (2013) conducted a study utilizing Yang and Allison's (2003) model to determine potential variations in the rhetorical move structure of discussions in research articles (RAs) authored in English by Thai and foreign writers. In their PhD theses, Pakistani research academics Alvi et al. (2017) attempted to characterize the movement structure of the sub-genre, the debate section, using the Peacock (2002) model, a modified version of Dudley Evans' (1994) move analysis. Six social science fields are included in the study: education, economics, geography, sociology, statistics, and psychology. Loan and Promoolsook (2015) investigated the step-by-step organization of the discussion and findings parts in 24 postgraduate Vietnamese master's theses. Salmani Nodoushan and Khakbaz (2011) randomly selected discussion sections of 46 masters theses from a pool of 93 discussions written in English by Iranian EFL students in an effort to determine the likely differences between the move structure of Iranian MA graduates' thesis discussion subgenres and those of their non-Iranian counterparts, on the one hand, and those of journal paper authors, on the other, and to identify the moves that are considered obligatory, conventional, or optional by Iranian MA graduates. A genre analysis of the Discussion portions of MA theses was done by Massoum and Yazdanmehr (2019) on native (English) and non-native (Iranian) English speakers studying English as a foreign language (TEFL). The objectives of Ariarad and Esfandiari's (2021) analysis of the discussion sections of Psychology Research articles were to pinpoint the moves and steps that define RAs in these sections and to look into how English and Iranian writers differ in their use of these moves and steps based on Swales' analysis of moves.

As far as the researchers are aware, however, no study has taken into account the rhetorical moves based on the well-formed model by Yang and Allison (2003) in the discussion sections of PhD dissertations in Applied Linguistics among three contexts of EFL, ESL, and native speakers. By considering this fact, the purpose of this study is to clarify the variations in rhetorical motion

structures across the argumentative portions of dissertations produced by PhD candidates who are native speakers, EFL learners, and ESL learners.

Based on the objective of the study, the following research questions and hypotheses were formulated:

*RQ1: What are the types and frequencies of various moves in the discussion sections of PhD dissertations written by EFL students, ESL students, and native students?*

*RQ2: Are there any significant differences in the frequency of various moves in the discussion sections of PhD dissertations written by EFL students, ESL students, and native students?*

*H0: There is no significant difference in the frequency of various moves in the discussion sections of PhD dissertations written by EFL students, ESL students, and native students.*

**METHOD**

**Corpus of the Study**

To fulfill this purpose, the researcher gathered the data from the discussion sections of 300 ELT postgraduate students' dissertations (100 Iranian ELT students' PhD dissertations, 100 Indian ELT students' PhD dissertations, and 100 English ELT students' PhD dissertations) within the time period from 2005 to 2020 amounting to 398,432 words in total. The data was gathered from different websites of the universities in Iran (as an EFL context), such as Tabriz University, Isfahan University, Tehran University, Ahvaz University, Urmia University, and so on, as well as from Irandoc. ir as the bank for Iranian theses and dissertations. For India (as an ESL context), the National University of India was the reference and database for the data collection, and regarding native speakers' dissertations, the UK and USA universities like Lancaster University, McGill University, the University of Birmingham, the University of Leeds and the University of Maryland and their websites were focused. In the case of native authors, the researchers made sure that the author's name was among the English names as much as possible.

**Theoretical Framework**

Three groups of native, ESL, and EFL dissertations in applied linguistics were examined for their rhetoric move structures using the move model developed by Yang and Allison (2003) as the foundation for move identification. Based on their earlier research, which looked at published research publications in applied linguistics, this move framework was created. Seven rhetorical devices are identified under this framework as being employed by writers in their discussions:

- *Move 1: Background Information*

This approach is frequently used by authors to restate the goals, objectives, guidelines, theories, and research questions (Weissberg & Buker, 1990). To do this, writers frequently include metadiscursive components, also known as metatext, to indicate to the reader where they are going (e.g., the aim of this study was to...).

- *Move 2: Reporting Results*

Authors utilize Move 2 to present the findings from their research. "Reporting verbs" and "past tense" are the primary textual elements that frequently indicate this shift. Examples, numerical data, graphs, tables, or observations are frequently used to make the point, along with remarks about whether results are expected or surprising (Rasmeenin, 2006). Data commentary is the term used to describe this.

- *Move 3: Summarizing Results*

This move is different from move 2 in that move 2 discusses specific results and factors, whereas here merely an overview of the results is given.

- *Move 4: Commenting on Results*

The author takes this action in order to, among other things, interpret their findings, offer subjective assessments of the outcomes of their studies, and compare their research with existing literature (Rasmeenin, 2006). The motion frequently utilizes one or more of these four stages in combination:

(1) Step A: Interpreting results,

(2) Step B: Comparing/Contrasting results with literature,

(3) Step C: Accounting for results, and

(4) Step D: Evaluating results (For examples of each step, please see Yang & Allison, 2003).

- *Move 5*: Summarizing the Study

Here, as opposed to in move 3, the authors give a synopsis of the entire investigation. In order to achieve this, they frequently combine terms like "study" and "research" with lexico-grammatical signals like the present perfect tense (Rasmeenin, 2006). This action is typically encountered at the conclusion of a conversation.

- *Move 6: Evaluating the Study*

Authors frequently make the sixth move, which involves evaluating their research in terms of its importance, constraints, boundaries, generalizability, uniqueness, and advantages and disadvantages. Similar to move 4, this move also frequently utilizes one or more steps:

(1) Step A: Indicating limitations,

(2) Step B: Indicating significance/advantage, and/or

(3) Step C: Evaluating methodology (Rasmeenin, 2006). In order to achieve this, authors frequently employ "positive" verbs to indicate how their research "expands on" or "adds to" the literature, "gains" new information, "contributes" to the body of existing knowledge, "is confined to" specific boundaries, is "only a means" to an end, "does not claim to be exhaustive," etc. (Ibid).

- *Move 7: Deductions from Research*

Authors frequently offer recommendations for future study topics or fixes for specific issues in this way. They might as well offer educational implications. The motion is frequently performed in one or more steps:

 (1) Step A: Making suggestions,

(2) Step B: Recommending further research, and/or

(3) Step C: Drawing pedagogic implications.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The dissertations had to be downloaded at the beginning of the study, which meant a lot of work on the researcher's part. To locate the specific ELT dissertations to include in the study, a search was conducted on the library websites of the aforementioned universities. The ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Portal was used to access a portion of dissertations written by native speakers or ESL students. The Electronic Digital Thesis Online Service (EThOS) of the British Library proved to be beneficial in locating potential PhD dissertations to incorporate into the research. However, early PhDs (from 2005 to 2010) were particularly hard to find, and requests for aid in locating them, as well as in acquiring copies of the PhD dissertations, were made to university libraries. Nevertheless, library records were not always complete, and several of the first PhD theses either lacked discussion parts entirely or combined their discussion sections with the results sections. As a result, the researcher had to keep them out of the research process. Similar issues were noted by Evans (2003), Liu and Buckingham (2018), and Herman and Sehoole (2017) in a recent research on the evolution of PhD education in South Africa with regard to their collection of doctoral theses. However, as the dissertation analysis and corpus area study proved worthwhile, the challenges lessened. The huge increase in PhD dissertations over the past few decades worldwide was the driving force for the decision (McCarthy & Wient, 2019; McIntyre, 2015). Following that, the discussion portions were taken out and put into Plain Format. The following stage of the study employed Yang and Allison's (2003) move model as a framework for move identification to determine the rhetoric move structures of three sets of applied linguistics dissertations: ESL, EFL, and native. Based on their earlier research, which looked at published

research publications in applied linguistics, this move framework was created. The researcher used the movements and procedures that were previously described to assess the discussion portions. Twenty percent of the data were rechecked and reanalyzed independently for various collocation types as well as move analysis section according to the frameworks under investigation by a second researcher who had taught discourse analysis for years at university and was familiar with the data analysis in order to ensure the reliability of the analysis in the process of data categorization. After 20% of the data, selected at random from the corpus, were coded by the second rater, the inter-rater reliability was calculated and reported. Using Cohen's Kappa formula to measure inter-rater agreement, the result was Kappa = 0.818, p = 0.000. SPSS version 21 was used to evaluate all of the data in order to respond to the study questions. Descriptive statistics and frequency information were provided in response to the study questions. Regarding the research topics, Chi-Square data analysis was used to compare the results in order to determine whether there were any notable variations in the frequency of moves among the three groups of writers.

## RESULTS

To answer the first research question, the moving model proposed by Yang & Allison (2003) was used as the framework for the move identification in order to find the rhetoric move structures of three groups of native and non-native dissertations in applied linguistics. Table 1 shows the results:

Table 1

*Types and frequency of moves by three groups*

| Move/ Step | EFL | | ESL | | Natives | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | P | F | P | F | P |
| **Move 1: Background Information** | 227 | 8% | 322 | 9% | 298 | 8% |
| **Move 2: Reporting Results** | 737 | 25% | 814 | 23% | 903 | 23% |
| **Move 3: Summarizing Results** | 54 | 2% | 83 | 2% | 100 | 3% |

**Move 4: Commenting on Results**

(1) Step A: Interpreting results,

|  | 119 | 4% | 203 | 5% | 218 | 6% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

(2) Step B: Comparing/Contrasting results with literature,

(3) Step C: Accounting for results, and

|  | 1227 | 43% | 1645 | 47% | 1685 | 44% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

(4) Step D: Evaluating results

|  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 0 |  |  |  |  |  |

|  | 87 | 3% | 120 | 4% | 149 | 4% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Move 5: Summarizing the Study** | 29 | 1% | 43 | 1% | 49 | 1% |

**Move 6: Evaluating the Study**

(1) Step A: Indicating limitations,

|  | 44 | 2% | 57 | 1% | 65 | 1% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

(2) Step B: Indicating significance/advantage, and/or

(3) Step C: Evaluating methodology

|  |  |  | 74 | 2% |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 87 | 3% |  |  | 91 | 2% |

|  |  |  | 0 | 0 |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 0 |  |  |  | 0 | 0 |

**Move 7: Deductions from Research**

(1) Step A: Making suggestions,

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 45 | 2% | 40 | 1% | 87 | 2% |

(2) Step B: Recommending further research and/or

(3) Step C: Drawing pedagogic implications.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | 119 | 3% | 127 | 3% |
| 135 | 5% |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 49 | 2% | 76 | 2% | 76 | 2% |

| Total |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 2840 | 100% | 3596 | 100% | 3848 | 100% |

From the total of 2840 sentences in the discussions written by Iranian EFL PhDs, from the total word count of 90505 in the discussion sections, as Table 1 shows, Move 4: Commenting on Results, Step B: Comparing/Contrasting results with literature was used at 1227 sentences with the percentage of 43% as the high frequent move and step. The other highly frequent move after Move 4 was Move 2: Reporting Results, which was observed in 737 instances (25%) and devoted second place to the highly frequent one. As it is clear from the category of Move 4: Commenting on Results, Step C: Accounting for Results, and Move 6: Evaluating the Study, Step C: Evaluating methodology was absent and was not observed in the corpus. The other moves and steps had rates between 8% and 1%.

For the ESL PhDs, from the total sentences of 3596 in the discussion sections, Move 4: Commenting on Results, Step B: Comparing/Contrasting results with literature was used at 1645 sentences with the percentage of 47% as the high frequent move and step. The other highly frequent move after Move 4 was Move 2: Reporting Results, which was observed in 814 instances (23%) and devoted second place to the highly frequent one. Like the first group (Iranian EFL students), ESL PhDs did not use the category of Move 4: Commenting on Results, Step C: Accounting for results and Move 6: Evaluating the Study, Step C: Evaluating methodology and the other moves and steps had the rates between 9% and 1%.

Finally, the frequency of moves and steps were reported in the native English speakers' manuscripts, and as the results showed, from among 3848 sentences used in the corpus, the same results were observed as obtained from the corpora of the other two groups. However, the frequencies were high due to the number of sentences and the total word counts. For this reason, Move 4: Commenting on Results, Step B: Comparing/Contrasting results with literature was used at 1685 sentences with a percentage of 44% as the most frequent move and step. The other highly frequent move after Move 4 was Move 2: Reporting Results, which was observed in 903 instances (23%) and devoted the second place as the highly frequent one. Like the other two groups, native English speakers did not use Step C: Accounting for Results from the category of Move 4: Commenting on Results and Step C: Evaluating Methodology from Move 6: Evaluating the Study. Like Iranian EFL learners, natives used the other moves with rates between 8% and 1%.
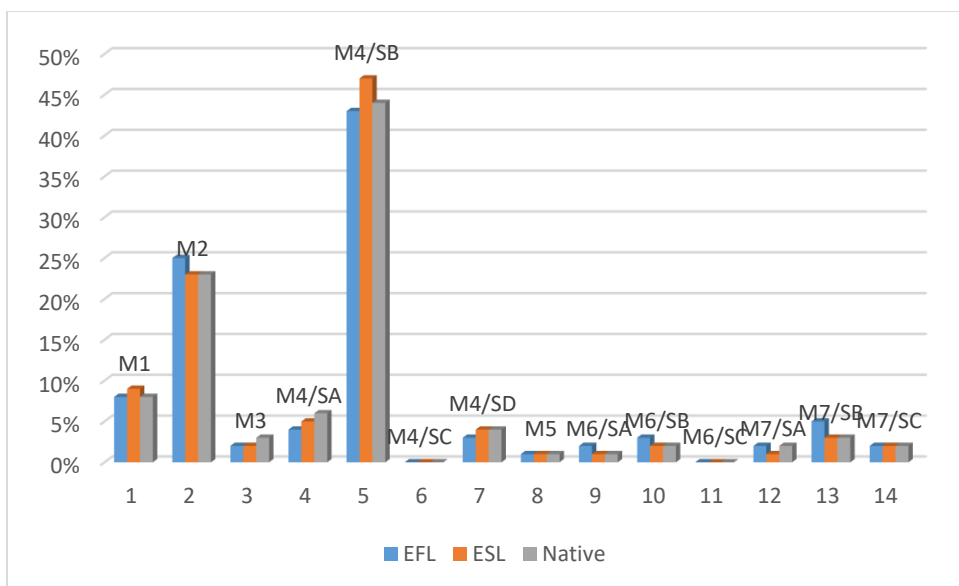
Figure 1 visualizes the results:

*Figure 1.* Distribution of the types of moves used by the groups

As it is clear from the above figure, the most frequently used moves by the three groups are M4/SB, and after that, M2 and M1 gained the other rates. Furthermore, the rate of some moves and steps, such as M4/SC, is 0 in all of the groups. The other moves and steps had rates between 1% and 3%.

The other research question aimed to explore the existence of any significant differences in terms of the various moves in the discussion sections of PhD dissertations written by EFL students, ESL students, and native students. In order to examine the existence of any significant differences in the rhetorical moves employed by three groups of students, a chi-square test was employed.

Table 2

*Chi-square Results of Rhetorical Moves*

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | .982[a] | 1 | .064 | | |
| Continuity Correction[b] | .064 | 1 | .064 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | .982 | 1 | .064 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .064 | .066 |

| Linear-by-Linear Association | .982 | 1 | .064 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 256,121 | | | | |

The results of the Chi-Square analysis, $x^2 = .982$, $p = 1.000$, revealed that differences in relation to the frequencies of the various moves in the discussion sections of PhD dissertations written by EFL students, ESL students, and native students were not statistically significant. In other words, although proportionately more rhetorical moves are used by native speakers in comparison to the other two groups, the differences did not reach a significant level. Put differently, there is no difference among EFL students, ESL students, and native students in terms of the various moves of the discussion sections of PhD dissertations. As a result, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

**DISCUSSION**

The results on the first question showed that M4/SB is the most frequently used maneuver in all three groups, while M2 and M1 received the other percentages in that order. Also, in each group, the rate for some moves and phases-like M4/SC and M6/SC-was zero, while the rates of the remaining actions and phases were between 1% and 3%. The results are also in agreement with findings of Basturkmen in dentistry and applied linguistics in 2012 and 2009 respectively. The author mainly focused on how Move 4 is employed by both novice and professional authors to comment on their work. Her study showed that professional and student writers use the same cycling pattern of repetition in reporting their results, the results reporting preceding the comments. She recast the remarking on leads to move into one step she preferred to call "explaining the results" because the word "explain" is a synonym of both accounting and interpretation. She did this after she felt it was really hard to distinguish between move 4 steps of "interpreting results" and "accounting for results" in Yang and Allison's model. Baştürkmen (2009) observed that

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proficient writers of RAs offered alternate explanations much more frequently than novice writers, indicating a distinction between two kinds of writers. This is because, as she summarized, the professional writers had more exposure to these alternative moves on account of their better theoretical and overall domain knowledge.

Massoum and Yazdanmehr (2019), too, identified the same results in their study. Discussion sections of M.A. theses submitted by TEFL students who were teaching English as a foreign language (native speakers of English) and non-native speakers of English (Iranian) were subjected to a genre-based analysis. Moreover, they also compared the distribution of the required, customary, and optional moves and steps the two corpuses made. More specifically, the move analysis model of Applied Linguistics, Yang and Allison 2003, was adopted. Chi-squared test was done to compare them. Only one statistical difference was found between the two groups. This was in summarizing the study. English-speaking TEFL thesis authors tend to summarise the study significantly more in the Discussion section than Iranian authors. The differences in required, customary, and optional move distribution were not that many and most of them were not statistically significant. The only observation was that restrictions are mentioned in Discuss sections far more frequently than by the Iranian writers of English. M4 usage was most frequent in both groups in the current study, while M6 and M7 usage was the least common. That means that both the groups considered the discussion of findings and analysis, clarification, and contrasting of those with prior research as more significant. These findings also support the study of Amnuai and Wannaruk (2013), who, while studying discussion parts of academic texts (research articles or RAs), did so in terms of move patterns.

Tewenty English discussion sections were investigated in the sphere of applied linguistics using Yang and Allison's 2003 move schema. They remarked on a large number of M2 and M4, which corroborates the present study. The study determined two moves to be obligatory: Moves 2 and 4. Move 2 represents a function of Reporting Results-the purpose of which is to present the readers with the main findings of the study. Normally, this is one of the most important sections that are considered when writing RA. To this end, one could say that the very point of discussing in any research is to comment on the findings through analysis, explanation, and comparison to previous research.

It might also be said that this is a platform where the authors would debate their results. On-site, they try to situate and/or claim their research results. Still, most authors try to provide explanations regarding interesting or surprising findings of their research. It is understood clearly that Moves 2 and 4 are the major rhetorical devices from the discussion parts of PhD dissertations written by two different groups of students. The two frequent occurring moves should serve as a kind of warning to the writers of applied linguistics discussion sections to become more alert or cautious. Concerning the second question of the present study, a Chi-square data analysis test has been used. The outcome indicated there was no significant difference between the groups of students: EFL students, ESL students, and native students, in using rhetorical devices in composing the PhD dissertation discussion sections.

That is, though the rhetorical devices used by the native speakers are relatively higher in proportion to the other two groups, no statistically significant difference was found between the latter two. As a result, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Perhaps all the students, regardless of context, attempted to employ the conventions of professional writing when composing their discussions, which could explain the reason for not observing striking differences between the discussions of the three groups of students when it comes to rhetorical devices containing academic collocations. Indeed, they have focused on the type of comment sections alone. Indeed, the findings give good reason to believe that Iranian PhD students have some idea about the requirements that arise during academic writing. Results were, therefore, compared to the study by Rahimpour and Faghih (2009) that investigated three types of educational texts, namely, the English texts produced by native speakers of the language, the texts in the English language written by Iranian citizens who are non-native speakers, and Persian-language papers composed by Iranians. They did so by analyzing ten metadiscoursal subtypes, which were alterations, framing the markers, endophoric the markers, evidential, code skips, hedges, boosts, attitude markers, engagement the markers and self-mentions that were adapted from Hyland's model 2004b. The study showed how the academic writing of these groups varied in the use of metadiscoursal-type rhetorical devices due to their different mother tongue languages. It was, however, established in the 2009 study by Rahimpour and Faghih that the Iranian non-native writers were conversant with the conventions of academic writing and employed metadiscoursal markers which were strikingly comparable to those of the native academic writers. Said Husin and Nurbayani 2017 also examined

the academic writing skills for students in the EFL context. In this sense, they evaluated the quality of thesis developed by Indonesian students at IAIN Samarinda within the English Department.

Descriptive and quantitative research was utilized to observe the quality of the theses written by IAIN Samarinda students in the English department. It observes language, structure, conceptual comprehension, theoretical framework, technique, content, writing process, and references cited. This study also investigated what factors may have impacted the thesis standards set by the students attending the English Department. The average grade for the 14 IAIN Samarinda English Department students writing a thesis during the academic year 2013-2014 was 3.16. On the scale, it falls between 2.61-3.40; hence, it reflects a good quality thesis. This character was pertinent to the informants' assessments of the caliber of their students' theses. Based on some observations, they assumed that their students were able to create thesis papers that were of quality, as represented by the average rating of 2.81 on a 2.61-3.40 scale. This may reveal that non-native speaking students are equally conscious about the demands of academic writing. In order to write in the most specialized discipline of writing, which is academic writing, students have to acquaint themselves with its conventions and standards. Moreover, there are similar studies to the current one that target discussion sections of master theses as representatives of academic genres. For example, within the ESP and EGP branches of Applied Linguistics, Shooshtari and Jalilifar (2012) studied the citation patterns of discussions that national and international article writers employ. Using the same paradigm developed by Thompson and Tribble, they also reported that local EAP and EGP authors tended to use integral citations more than non-integral citations. International writers seem to focus more on useful rather than formal criteria, use a greater range of citation types, and acknowledge other people's work more. Their research confirmed the results of Jalilifar et al. (2012) and showed that they are using citations to a much greater extent. In other words, given the limitations in participants' number because of the challenge of data collection, this study may give big assistance to improving learner research and behavior of writing. The conversation of the results is especially relevant to help students express their own voices compared to other studies. Discussion sections are interesting, as they provide the views of authors besides the research results.

Besides, the sections of discussion play a relevant role, since they are some of the most challenging parts that authors can write, specifically for those who are non-native speaking writers with little experience as researchers.

Whatever context any author or researcher may have had, the results should be a very valuable reference to which novice researcher writers in that particular domain could refer for guidance while writing the discussion sections of the RA. This, of course, is only a guess, and to validate it, other tools should be employed such as unstructured and structured discussions with the discussion writers themselves.

**CONCLUSION**

There is an increasing recognition of the fact that different linguistic and cultural realities pose a challenge that needs to be understood and addressed in the case of doctoral students hailing from diverse backgrounds, especially when it comes to academic writing. Keeping this fact in view, the present study focused on rhetorical devices and tried to locate the kinds of different moves in the discussions of PhD research papers written by three groups of ELT students, namely EFL, ESL, and natives. Another aspect of the study was to investigate the frequencies of different moves in the debate sections of PhD dissertations composed by the above-mentioned students. The research topics were addressed using the Yang and Allison 2003 paradigm. The results show that M4/SB is the maneuver that the three groups employ most frequently and M2 and M1 gain the other rates following thereafter. Furthermore, some of the actions/stages, including M4/SC have zero dispersion across all groups. As was shown in the move analysis, the main purpose of the discussion section is to remark on findings of the research by analyzing, explaining, and comparing them with previous studies. One can say this is a platform from which the writers discuss their findings. In the domain, they try to position and /or claim their research results. Yet, most authors attempt to explain surprise or interesting findings of the research. From a discourse development point of view, in applied linguistics, the relative frequency of two movements in movements 2 and 4 may be a useful symptom in developing high-quality debates by drawing the attention of authors and dissertation editors.

In regard to the second research question, a Chi-square data analysis test was used, and from the results, it is indicated that there is no statistical significance in the difference of rhetorical

strategies employed by the teams of EFL, ESL, and native students in composing the PhD dissertation discussion sections. That is to say, even though native speakers have more rhetorical moves than EFL/ESL students, there is no significant difference among those three groups regarding all the moves of the discussion sections of PhD dissertations; therefore, a null hypothesis could not be rejected. All of the students did their best to follow the conventions of writing for academia in their discussions irrespective of the setting, and this could account for the appreciable differences that do not exist between the discussions that the three sets of students produced according to the frequency of rhetorical devices. In fact, they emphasized only the type of comment sections. Indeed, the results show that Iranian PhD respondents, like the other two groups, had some background knowledge of what academic writing demands.

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**Biodata**