

Contextual Layers in the Establishment of Research Niche in Doctoral Thesis Introductions by Malaysian Writers

Siti Zaidah Zainuddin
zaidah75@um.edu.my
Universiti Malaya

Azianura Hani Shaari
azianura@ukm.edu.my
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

ABSTRACT

One of the key moves in thesis introductions in terms of Swales's CARS is Move 2: Establishing the Niche. It is where researchers provide the justifications of the study after introducing the general area of the research. However, research findings of prior work have focused on thesis introductions which relates to how texts are constructed and organised in systematic ways in terms of Swales's (1990) CARS moves and steps, and how these two organisational elements assist in achieving the overall purpose of the genre. These move analysis studies of Introductions do not examine and explain why each move and step are written the way they are through the lens of various contextual layers. The current study views genre through the Contrastive Rhetoric (CR) lens in looking at context as multilayered. The study examines how different levels of context influence how eight ESL Malaysian writers establish their research niche. Adopting the functional-semantic approach to analysis, it can be concluded that apart from the multi-layered discourse community of their academic setting, the socio-cultural and socio-political contexts have a significant effect on the establishments of the writers' research niche.

Keywords: doctoral thesis introductions; genre analysis; establishing niche; ESL; discourse community

INTRODUCTION

Writing introductions are known to be troublesome to almost all academic writers. Swales (1990) and Burgess (2002), amongst others, suggest that it is even more difficult for non-native English speaker (NNES) writers. Noted problems include understanding the research requirement of the research genre (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006) and difficulties in the organisation of ideas (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 1995, 1997). Paltridge and Starfield (2007) also emphasise the rhetorical issues of developing the thesis structure and its constituent parts as problem for NNES writing a thesis in English.

Yet Bhatia (1997a, p. 183) asserts that introductions in academic work have "a single dominating fairly general function of introducing a written or spoken academic event". A thesis introduction, according to Swales and Feak (1994), plays a key role in creating a research space for the writer and it is here that the writer makes claims for the centrality or significance of the study. Even though the language and rhetorical features of the introductory chapters written by NNES writers may differ, the sole purpose of this genre is globally similar, namely, to introduce the study and persuade the reader to accept that the study being reported is worthy and valid. In order to achieve this goal, writers have to appropriately strategise their Introductions. They have to offer some background information

on the topic, find the niche of the study within the research area and finally introduce the study undertaken (Hashim, 2008). These are all globally recognisable strategies that help to realise the ratification of knowledge (Koutsantoni, 2006).

This globally recognised purpose of the introductory chapter operates within its own peculiar, socially constructed conventions and norms. The writers must adhere to these norms and conventions set by a socio-culturally bound discourse community of which writers are a part. Exploring this stand within the Malaysian context would be a fascinating topic for investigation. Like Singapore, the English language in Malaysia is widely used for intra and inter-ethnic communication. However, the first language, the cultural values and the “politically-governed” education system may have, to a certain extent, influenced the student writers’ way of writing. Malaysian ESL writers writing their thesis introductions may have their own strategies in structuring introductory chapters. These strategies, in order to achieve the global purpose of the thesis introductions, may need to be adapted and modified to their own socio-cultural and academic discourse community.

This exploratory study of eight doctoral theses aims to identify how these writers organise their theses’ introductory chapters, particularly how they strategise their niche establishment to achieve both the universal purpose of this genre and their own socio-cultural identity.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Two significant concepts in defining genre are communicative purpose and discourse community. These two concepts reinforce each other in describing a genre. The various communicative functions of a genre exhibit conventionalised linguistic patterns, or lexicogrammatical realisations, which are recognised as such by the discourse community. Swales (1990, pp. 24-27) lists six defining characteristics of a discourse community, which is perhaps the best known attempt at describing and pinning down the concept. One of the characteristics of a discourse community is that it “has a broadly agreed set of common public goals”. The importance of the concept of discourse community is also shared by other writers such as Johns (1997), though his notion of community somewhat differs. Johns (1997) sees common interests amongst the communities as essential rather than Swales’s common goals. Dudley-Evans and St John (2007, p. 92) assert that the concept of discourse community is best considered as a virtual concept where writers or speakers will be affected by expectations of that genre. An individual can be a member of many discourse communities and therefore, communities can be large and formless. Since a genre is shaped by its communicative purposes and the forms of language are said to be shaped by the discourse community, the communicative purpose of a thesis introduction is recognisable and shared by members of the academic community. The structures, content and style of thesis introductions are constrained by the discourse community, in this case the people who directly and indirectly participate in the discourse. This also implies the way in which writers manoeuvre strategies to create their research space.

This study also considers the notion of ESL writing from the point of view of Contrastive Rhetoric (CR), in particular the view that culture influences written discourse. CR can provide a framework for comparing ESL theses with those written in other non-English speaking countries, and by doing so, assists in analysing the possible contributions of individual, organisational and national level cultural factors to find commonalities and variations in the theses investigated in the study and those in the existing literature. At its most basic, CR is defined as “an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and, by referring

to the rhetorical strategies of the first language, attempts to explain them” (Connor, 1999, p. 5).

Many text linguistic studies have contrasted discourse patterns of various kinds in different languages as well as English. Researchers analysing Arabic (Johnstone, 1986; Ostler, 1987), Chinese (Eason, 1995; Li & Thompson, 1982; Matelene, 1985), Hindi (Kachru, 1983) and Japanese (Hinds, 1980, 1983; Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Kobayashi, 1984) claim that these languages have their own characteristic rhetorical organisations of expository and argumentative prose. Two of the most researched areas in CR and text linguistics are the differences between inductive and deductive patterns of organising text and how the reader/writer responsibility in a specific culture affects the writers’ composition. Influential studies in the area of early CR taking the first two approaches have provided support for the claim that culture does have a significant impact on the writing product. This traditional concept of CR has been criticised, challenging both the hypothesis as well as taking issue with methodological concerns. CR studies of writing have now expanded the type of writing analysis and have acknowledged the complexities of cultural, social and educational factors affecting a writing situation. Connor (2008), in order to theorise the new CR and set the agenda for practical research applications, incorporated Fairclough’s (1992) text in context theory. Through Fairclough (1992), CR considers writing as a socially constructed activity and process. When doing research in writing, this theory postulates that the researcher not only examines the text, but also the “discursive and social practices” surrounding the text (Connor, 2008). Further, Connor (2008) suggests a model that posits various overlapping cultures in which national and cultural features of writing are embedded and cannot be isolated. Connor’s (2008) take on CR is a valuable insight for the present study in that it provides an understanding of the complexity of interacting cultures in an educational setting.

GENRE-CONTRASTIVE RHETORIC THEORY – IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY

In addition to the expansion of the concept of genre and the definition of culture, CR has moved to emphasise the social situation of writing. Mirroring the concept of genre, writing is regarded as socially situated in that it has to correspond to the norms and expectations of its community. Therefore, viewing genre through the CR lens of “context and culture” assists in looking at context as multi-layered. Although the initial impetus of CR, which was to assess cultural influence in discourse, is seen as stereotyping Western people and other users of English, it is still useful, especially when it is applied to a genre written by non-native speakers and when it involves the institutional context. The present study is grounded in the current understanding of genre and CR, including not just the big culture relationship to text but also the relationship of the text to the context in which it is produced. Context will be looked at in terms of a number of layers – the big culture which is the sociocultural elements and the small culture in which we have several levels of context. Samraj (2002, p. 165) presents a useful model of the relationship between academic writing and the context that influences the writing (see Figure 1). This model specifically addresses writings by students who are taking a course at an educational institution. The highest level of context that appears to influence academic writing is the academic institution. The academic discipline forms a contextual level below this. The next level of the model is the context of the course which, according to Samraj (2002), does not completely overlap with the discipline in terms of its value. A more specific context is that of task, and finally there is the context of each individual student in terms of the background and choices influencing the text produced. The present study, however, does not take into account the context of student as this requires a more in-depth methodological evaluation.

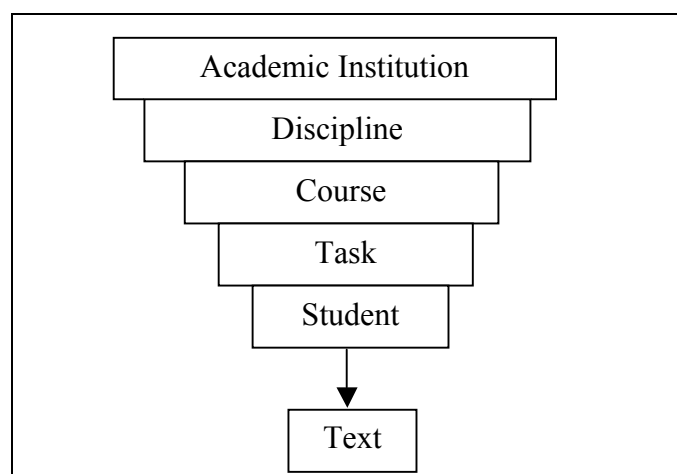


FIGURE 1. Layers of context (Samraj, 2002a, p. 165)

RELATED STUDIES

Many contrastive move-based studies look at research article (RA) sections (Meurer & Dellagnelo, 2008; Amirian et al., 2008; Morales, 2012; Amnuai & Wannaruk, 2013). A remarkable number of cross-cultural move-based research on research article introductions (RAIs) have also been conducted (Zhang & Hu, 2010; Sheldon, 2011; Martin & Pérez, 2014; Nguyen & Pramoolsook, 2016). One common finding from these cross-cultural studies is that the structures of introductions vary in terms of moves and steps, their frequency and their sequence. These studies also assist us in understanding the relationship between the multi-layered context of the academic setting and introductions- that culture does, to some extent, shape the research space. Several genre studies of thesis introductions, though limited, provide an overview of organisational moves and steps in different settings and languages (Bunton, 2002; Arulandu, 2005; Samraj, 2002b, 2008; Soler-Monreal et al., 2011; Nguyen & Pramoolsook, 2014). Even though the aim of these studies was to identify the organisational structure of the thesis introductory chapter at the move and step level, there was also some identification of the social and cultural context as influencing factors of moves and steps, but only minimally so. For instance, Nguyen and Pramoolsook (2014) look at the rhetorical structure of introductions in twelve Master's theses by novice Vietnamese and they found that the multi-layers of academic context, in their case the discipline, influenced the use of Move 2: Establishing the Niche. They also discovered that the most favoured Move 2 is Step 1B- Indicating and Problem and Need because 'this step is likely to be the easiest way for these writers to argue for the relevance of their current study', (Nguyen and Pramoolsook 2014, p. 68).

One of the earliest studies to analyse the structure of academic research utilising the CARS model in Malaysia was conducted by Ahmad (1997). Her analysis of Move 2 provides insights into how the writers establish the niche of their study, whether they are simply addressing a gap or employing a more critical evaluation of a niche. Ahmad reported that the articles simply described and summarised, and rarely criticised or evaluated previous work. This means that the writers were merely using previous literature as the main source of establishing territory but did not review and evaluate previous work critically which were deemed "evasive and diffident" (Ahmad, 1997, p. 292). The basis of the findings pointed to a lack of pressure and competitiveness amongst the academic community. A more recent study was done by Lim (2012). Using mixed-method approach, he investigated how experienced writers use rhetorical steps and linguistic choices to establish the niche of management research articles. Lim (2012) revealed that 'indicating a gap' and 'adding to what is known'

were created using various persuasive communicative devices. Lim's (2012) study is crucial as it informs us of the difficulties in coding the moves and its importance of having some clear criteria of moves and steps so as to have a distinct line of demarcation.

The above studies inform us about the interrelation between moves and steps analysis and the context, particularly how ESL writers create a space for their research. The overall results of the above studies show that the context of writers, particularly of ESL/EFL writers, influences the way in which they create their research niche. As studies of the influence of context on niche establishment in thesis introductions are lacking in Malaysia, the present study attempts to analyse how contexts of several layers explain the rhetorical moves, specifically when writers create their research niche in the introductory chapter.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH APPROACH

This case study employs aspects of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. According to Croker (2009), when little is known about a phenomenon or even when the existing research is limited, qualitative research is very useful for the exploration of possible patterns and underlying processes. But it also uses quantitative tools for coding, measurement, mapping and describing the moves and steps employed by writers to accomplish their communicative purposes. This study adopts constructivist and naturalistic perspectives. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), cited in Bunton (2002), state that "naturalism proposes that, as far as possible, the social world should be studied in its 'natural state', undisturbed by the researcher". Based on this, the present study looked at naturally occurring texts, doctoral theses which had been submitted, examined and confirmed. There was no intervention during the writing process.

CORPUS SELECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Eight theses were chosen from three research universities in Malaysia because the research community of the three universities was well established. It is important to note that the three universities participating in this study are further under the jurisdiction of the Department of Higher Education, an organisation that regulates the nation's higher educational institutions, i.e., both public and private higher education in Malaysia. Its vision follows that of the ministry: to develop Malaysian Higher Educational Institutions as centres of academic excellence to an international standard. Therefore, to ensure the higher education sector's vision is in line with the ministry's and consequently, the government's, the Department of Higher Education coordinates the policies, funding and activities. The doctoral candidature of the thesis writers are funded by the ministry after a careful and thorough selection. The two disciplines selected were Social Sciences and Humanities. This was not only to make the corpora as similar as possible but also because of the prominent variation in textual patterns. Also echoing Duszak (1997, p. 11), the communication styles in the humanities and the social sciences "respond strongly to language and culture-bound discursual preferences and constraints". The areas of studies were then restricted to English or Educational Studies. In addition to considering the fields, only recently graduated postgraduate students were selected. This must be taken into consideration since the temporal factor might also affect the rhetorical configuration of texts (Moreno, 2008), since genres are fluid and not of a fixed nature.

This study primarily takes a top-down approach when coding, based on meaning. However, to code a text segment, the function of which is uncertain, a bottom-up approach is

used for confirmation, and reference is made to several linguistic features. Since the study is derived from Swales's (1990) perspective on genre, the unit of analysis should realise the communicative purpose of the text. This can be realised flexibly in a clause, a sentence, several sentences and paragraphs.

This study examined the moves and steps of doctoral theses through Kwan's (2006) and Lewin et al.'s (2001) semantic-functional approach as well as Samraj's (2002) concept of the "real world" which concerned with the importance of the topic being discussed and the "research world knowledge", assertions about active research activity in the area concerned. The semantic approach to coding, according to Kwan, is an analysis through recurring ideational elements that can categorise a move or a step. According to Lewin et al. (2001, p. 30), every move should contain at least one of the following participants: a research (product or producer); the phenomena being studied; and/or the population affected by the phenomena where each participant should bear some form of "attribute". They note that selecting the semantic term "attribute" would allow coding to include all descriptions, regardless of their grammatical class. In classifying Moves 1 and 2 through the semantic approach, Lewin et al. (2001) identified two basic categories, common to the two moves of the CARS (1990) model but realised variably in them. The first is "participants" and the second is "claim". While coding following the semantic approach, we also tend to refer to linguistic clues such as conjunctions. Fixed formulaic as well as discourse clues, including the sub-headings, are also employed. Although they do not explicitly and directly signal the boundary of units, they facilitate their identification, to some extent, by providing important information for the analyst to understand and so identify the communicative purpose of the segment of a text.

THE CODING CRITERIA

This sub-section discusses the coding criterion reflecting the communicative purposes of the texts which are recognised by the expert members of the multilayered discourse community as definitive for the particular genre.

i) Move 2 Step 1a (M2s1a): Indicating a Gap

In the present study, a statement of gap indication suggests nonexistence, scarcity, or paucity of the research world. An M2s1a statement is indicated by quantifiers, for instance, negative quantifiers, "bad" quantifiers that show negation, and negative polarity items. Statements indicating a gap can sometimes be implied.

In identifying Move 2 Step 1a: Indicating a gap as the niche establishment, some linguistic clues were referred to. According to Werle (2007, p. 4), a sentence that expresses nonexistence can be derived in different ways: through negative quantifiers alone or through polarity items. The negative quantifiers that express nonexistence are the English "no" series, for example, *no*, *nothing*, *no one/nobody* and *never*. Negative polarity items (Cruse, 2004, p. 308) are expressions such as *anyone*, *anything*, *ever* or *any*. An example of a negative quantifier is shown below:

However, most studies on language learning strategies have been classroom-based.

(Thesis 2)

The inclusion of "however" in the sentence above shows that the writer suggests there is a lack of language learning studies in other approaches besides the classroom-based approach and the writer wishes to fill in the gap. Therefore, the example can be coded as M2s1a. It was also found that the gap that the writer wants to fill can also be presented implicitly. There is no indication of any linguistic clues provided by the writer. The next

excerpt shows that there are studies lacking in Malaysia as previous studies were done in other countries.

It was also discovered that these studies **concentrated on Chinese university students** such as in Hong Kong, China and Australia.

(Gow, Kember & Chow, 1991; Kember & Gow, 1994)

ii) Move 2 Step 1b (M2s1b): Establishing Need and Problem

In this study, Step M2s1b: Problem and need, encompasses both real-world and theoretical topics. The real-world problems and need statements pertaining to the real world are the claims related to the current phenomenon of the theme/topic under study. The problematic and need statements of theoretical topics on the other hand display claims associated with the study's theory or conceptual focus. A more detailed conception of this step is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Different aspects of Problem and Need

	Categorisation	Description
Problem	Problematic scenario and theoretical topics	Explicit
Need	Problems of real-word and theoretical topics	Explicit (lexeme "need") and implied (lexeme "importance" and others)

iii) Move 2 Step 1c (M2s1c): Counter-claim

The description of a counter-claim in this study was consistent with Kwan's (2006) criteria. Counter-claiming statements in the present study show defects in a specific research-oriented practice. The defects can display negative evaluations (e.g., limitations, shortcomings) of research design (e.g., theory, data collection) as well as presenting negative evaluations (e.g., insufficient) of research outcomes/results. Below is an example of this step.

However, most of the studies in this field in the Malaysian context have generally employed the survey questionnaire method in data collection (1). While this method of data collection may be straightforward and less complicated in terms of analysis, the responses may be insufficient in providing full explanation of the speakers' communicative behaviour (2).

Her study, however, **only examines one aspect of the workplace domain**: the interview context.

iv) Move 2 Step 1d (M2s1d): Continuing Tradition

Following Kwan, continuing tradition is "the claiming of the extension of the line of research or an application of a particular established practice" (Kwan, 2005). In other words, the current study may extend previous research's research design, theory, setting or instruments. The excerpt from Thesis 1 shows that the author follows the previous study, which is similar but carried out in a different context (continuation of previous research). The lexical item "this" refers to the context and "basis" is used to distinguish the function of this statement.

In fact, **this forms the basis** for the research interest of the present study.

v) Move 2 Step 1e (M2s1e): Question Raising

Distinguishing question-raising can be presented in two ways: direct and indirect speech. by direct and indirect questions is inadequate because the issue in question should create the central purpose of the study instead of being information of knowledge background.

Following Cruse (2004) question raising should comprise of the “asking feature” and “what is asked”, which involves a proposition. In order for a statement of question raising to be the central purpose of the study, the “answer-value” is derived from the writer’s results section. The excerpt below is taken from Thesis 2 to illuminate this point.

<p>While there is a shared consensus about the functions and goals of higher education, <i>there is much debate</i>, as will be presented in the next section, <i>as to whether</i> these students are accomplishing the intended objectives.</p>	<p>-Asking feature: indirect -What is asked (the answer to the question “Whether students accomplish the objectives of higher education” will be answered later in the “Result” section.</p>
---	---

Therefore, for the purpose of the present study, the semantic features of question-raising, must include an asking feature, which can be direct or indirect questions, and “what is asked”, that is, what the writer’s research tries to address.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with findings of the overall frequency distribution of Move 2 steps and follows with a detailed analysis of each step. However, only three steps are discussed as they are the most frequently used strategies by the writers.

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF STEPS IN MOVE 2

As described, there are five ways in which the writers establish the niche strategies: M2s1a: Indicating gap; M2s1b: Indicating problem and need; M2s1c: Counter-claim; M2s1d: Continuing tradition; and M2s1e: Question-raising. Figure 2 indicates the percentages of Move 2 steps accounted for by each of these steps.

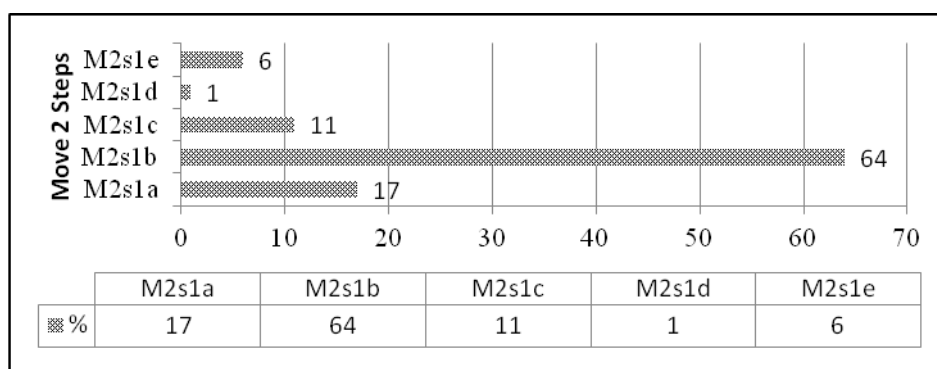


FIGURE 2. Percentage occurrences (%) of Move 2 steps

Based on Figure 2, M2s1b is a major step in the Malaysian writers’ thesis Introductions. The writers’ dependence on this particular step was obvious as this move accounts for 64% of the total steps involving Move 2. Indicating a gap was the second most frequent step, followed by M2s1c, a step where a writer makes counter-claims against some published studies. The least frequent step of Move 2 is M2s1d which is Continuing Tradition. Next, the preferred step in each thesis is shown in Figure 3.

PREFERRED STEPS IN EACH THESIS

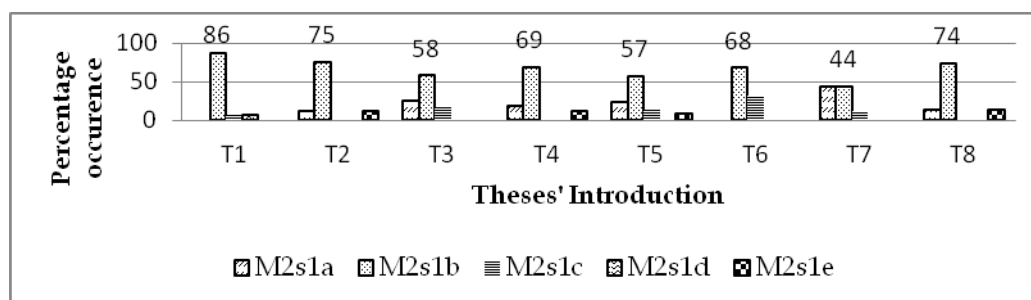


FIGURE 3. Percentage occurrence of Move 2 steps

Figure 3 clearly shows that M2s1b: indicating a problem and need is an obligatory step where all writers employed this step as the main strategy when establishing a niche for their topic. The highest frequency of occurrence of step M2s1b were in Thesis 1, where 86% of the total steps were dedicated to the writer presenting the problem of the study and a positive justification for the need of the study. The lowest frequency of occurrence of this step can be found in Thesis 7. The writer dedicated only 44% of this step to establishing the niche. However, all thesis writers did not depend solely on one strategy when establishing their particular niche. Most the introductory chapters (6 out of 8) employed three steps of Move 2.

The second most preferred step is M2s1a: Gap indication. Figure 3 shows that six of the theses which occupied this step considered it to be one of the most important strategies in niche establishment. The next step, which was also found in five theses, but at a very minimal occurrence is M2s1d: Question-raising. The least preferred step amongst the writers is M2s1e: Continuing a tradition. It only occurred in two theses.

As proposed earlier in the article, moves and their subsequent steps are influenced by the multi-layered discourse community of the genre. In the case of the present study, the array of niche strategies in the introduction chapters might be attributed to the juxtaposition of the core purposes of the text itself. It has been acknowledged that writing a thesis in general is an arduous task for a novice writer because it is a combination of an argumentative text as well as a persuasive one. Kamimura and Oi (1998) stated that as argumentative discourse, it should integrate rational and affective appeals. Therefore, a writer has to inform, refute and convince her audience about her position and claim that the research is worth doing.

How do the acts of informing, refuting and convincing the readers affect a text's variety of niche strategies? By providing the reader background information on the topic under discussion or presenting the current scenario, the writer actually wants to argue a point. Three different strategies can be used to achieve the writer's niche: indicating problem and need, counter-claiming previous studies, and indicating the gap. For example, Writer 4 spoke of the difficulties in non-native students' writing approaches and processes. After a long description of the scenario, the writer indicated the problem and the repercussions for the students and their country if this study was not carried out. The writer of Thesis 4, therefore, employed M2s1b: problem and need strategy. However, it was not enough to rely on the strategy above as the arguments only evoked the emotional empathy of readers. The writer of Thesis 4 acknowledged that she had to include a more rational appeal.

One way to create a rational appeal is by refuting an argument that a writer disagrees with (Cavender & Kahane, 1989). A writer may suggest that the results in previous studies are fallacious because of the shortcomings in the theories used, the perspective underlying the study, or even inappropriate methods (M2s1c). Writer 4 utilised this strategy. She informed

the readers of the theories of L2 writing and then discussed the flaws in some of the theories, which were the teachers' incorrect methods when following the process approach to teaching in the writing class. To further strengthen her argument why her study was needed, she pointed out that such a study had not been done in Malaysia (M2s1a).

M2S1B: PROBLEM AND NEED

The attention given to indicating the problem and need when establishing the niche of their studies differ. Table 2 below shows that Malaysian introductory chapters employed more statements of needs than statements of problems in Move 2.

TABLE 2. Occurrences of statements of problems and needs

Step M2s1b	Problem	Need	Total
Occurrences	36	44	80

Samraj (2002) suggests in her study that statements of problems usually precede the justification for why the study is needed. The writers who used the 'need' statements strategy in this order may want to elevate the problem of the research subject as a way of justifying the research. This interpretation seems relevant also to the present study. The first sentence in Example 4.1 from Thesis 5 aims to problematise a theory (see 1) used in the research area. The following sentence then shows a need for a new approach suitable for the study (see 2).

Example 4.1: A Statement of Problems That Precede a Statement of Need in Thesis 5

Creative process, for instance, cannot be studied in isolation and it requires a thorough examination of the importance of environmental issues and personality traits as well (1). Therefore, the study of creativity requires an integrated approach which examines the creative process (Process), on one hand, and its relationship with creative personality traits (Person), creative environment (Press), and creative product (Product) on the other (2).

Further analysis showed that all eight theses showed similar types of problem statements: they either portrayed the current problematic real-world phenomenon or presented any shortcomings in the underpinned theory or concept of the study. However, 81% of problem statements were dedicated to those of the real world. For example, the writer of Thesis 2 used her observations during teaching to point to the current problematic situation of students at the National University of Malaysia, where her research was located. A lengthy description on the students' difficulties in the ESL classroom was provided to establish the niche. The extract from her introductory chapter proves this point:

Example 4.2: Real-world Problem Statement in Thesis 2.

In the researcher's personal experiences of teaching English to second language learners (1), she also discovered similar encounters within the reading context. One problem that confronted the students was when they were not familiar with the words in the text (2). The lack of vocabulary knowledge acted as a barrier ... Throughout the reading of the text, these students may have needed to stop their reading many times to attend to unknown words. As a result, the reading process becomes a slow and stressful experience. Due to these experiences, many students often ignored the words that they did not know and continued reading. However, when they stumbled across many unknown words, comprehension of the text broke down and finally the reading is ceased (3).

In (1), the writer relates the problem of her study by presenting her own personal experience when teaching ESL students. Following that, she claimed the main problem of students' difficulty in reading was unfamiliarity with vocabularies (2). The bulk of the discussion is the detailed situation in her classroom during the reading activity. Because these scenarios are so challenging, the students will eventually disregard reading (3).

Another common attribute of M2s1b is statement of needs. Table 2 above shows that statements of need as the strategy for establishing a niche are more prevalent than those of problems. Justification of need for the study also revolved around the real-world phenomenon and the theoretical topics phenomenon. One fascinating characteristic of a need statement in Move 2 is the common depiction of patriotic obligation. Of the forty-four Move 2 "need" statements, we found nine (9) occurrences where the writers explicitly expressed urgency and the importance of the study to the country. Extracts taken from Thesis 4 and Thesis 5 in Example 4.3 illustrate our point:

Example 4.3: Patriotic Obligation in Statement of Need in Thesis 4 and Thesis 5.

- (i) The main focus that needs to be addressed is the teaching strategies and techniques that could help our Malaysian teachers be better teachers, and how we can help teachers to improve their subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and practical knowledge. (Thesis 4)
- (ii) ... a study on the Malaysian children's creativity has been found necessary to help establish the Malaysian creativity profile (Thesis 4).
- (iii) As such, a study on Year Five children's creativity is viewed necessary to substantiate the body of knowledge on creativity in this country. (Thesis 5)

As discussed, an introductory chapter is both argumentative and persuasive. Valid arguments have to be imparted. In addition, persuading the readers to accept the claim is also important in writing an Introduction and it directly affects the writer's strategies. A writer has to bear in mind who her audience is. In most cases, the main audience of a thesis is the examiners. In the case of the present study, the theses were written for a dual audience: the examiners and the officers in the ministry who awarded them the scholarships. Almost all of the writers had a special government scheme or scholarship to support them during their doctoral candidature. This scheme is given particularly to research that may contribute new knowledge in a particular field as well as to the betterment of the country. Studies in the education and language fields for instance are essential because the outcomes of these studies are hoped to contribute to the government's nation building and transformation plan, which are considered a core agenda of the country. The idea of doing something for the sake and benefit of the country has been infused in every Malaysian's way of life. This need-type statement is a powerful rhetorical tool in Malaysian writers' attempts to establish their study's niche. Therefore, it is common to read statements about the importance of their study to the country.

M2S1A: INDICATING A GAP

Indicating a gap step is another common strategy in establishing the niche of a study. It has been found in all move-step analysis studies, particularly with reference to academic research writing. Figure 3 above has indicated that this step was the second most common step used to launch the study's niche. Table 3 shows the importance of this step in individual theses.

TABLE 3. M2s1a Steps as a Percentage of Total Move 2 steps

Thesis	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	Overall
Percentage	-	9.0	14.0	14.0	23.0	-	36.0	4.0	100
Total (n)	0	2	3	3	5	0	8	1	22

Six of the theses relied on gap indication, which constituted 17% of the total steps used in the study. The highest occurrence of this step can be found in Thesis 7 with 36% per cent. Twenty-three per cent of Move 2 steps in Thesis 5 were dedicated to M2s1a. Both Thesis 3 and Thesis 4 have the same M2s1a occurrence and only nine per cent of Move 2 was dedicated to M2s1a in Thesis 2. The lowest frequency occurrence of this step was found in Thesis 8 with only four per cent occurrence. Theses 1 and 6 did not employ this particular Move 2 step. The linguistic criteria discussed can be applied to the rest of the theses. All statements of gap indication showed either non-existence or scarcity of research in the field. . The extract from Thesis 7 in Example 4.4 below shows the lack of research into determining the language use in the public organisations using a negative quantifier.

Example 4.4: Gap Indication in Thesis 7.

However, there is very little documented information on language use within organisations which can provide evidence of this policy. Little is known about the extent to which BM, or other languages, is used in the organisations.

M2S1C: COUNTER-CLAIM

The third most commonly employed step when establishing the niche of the study in the introductory chapters in the present study was M2s1c: Counter- claim. M2s1c can be seen in Example 4.4 where the writer criticised the methods used in the previous studies because they led to inconclusive results.

Example 4.4: Statement of Counter Claim in Thesis 5.

[Most of the creativity studies in the past focused on respondents’ cognitive (Process) and personality traits (Person). They were done in isolation] (1) [and resulted in a fragmented view of creativity (Sternberg, 1999)] (2). [For instance, the Cognitive (Process) and Social Personality approaches (Person) provided valuable insights into creativity but Cognitive studies alone failed to relate the influence of personality attributes and environmental factors on the creative process of respondents (Sternberg, 1999). Similarly, Personality and Social Psychological approaches ignored the importance of mental process underlying creativity.] (3)

The writer of Thesis 5 has previously presented similar studies that have been done within the area of creativity. The counter claim statement begins when the writer claimed that research in creativity cannot be carried out in isolation (see 1). Then, she further suggested that the repercussions of such research would be defective outcomes as mentioned in (see 2). In order to strengthening her claim, the writer then in (see 3) gave some examples of the issues when the study looked at only one aspect of Creativity.

The importance of this step in other studies is inconsistent. Bunton (2002) and Arulandu (2005) found that thesis writers rarely used this step when establishing the niche of the study. They considered this step to be optional since it was only occasionally present. Salom-Monreal et al. (2008) on the other hand found that this step was used as much as the steps indicating gap indication and problem statement. It is also important to note that many contrastive studies across cultures of RAIs show M2s1c is not a preferred step. The lack of focus on counter-claims by Chinese scholars in Zhang and Hu’s (2010) study has led them to claim that Chinese writers tend to avoid critical evaluation of other research. Some of the

writers even employ self-citation as a way “to continue the research tradition” (p. 88). Zhang and Hu’s (2010) also suggest that Chinese writers prefer to offer a positive review. When they do criticise other studies, they mitigate their evaluative tone. Chinese writers were also found to “understate their research to show their respect to other researchers, avoid criticism, or show honesty and modesty” (Zhang & Hu, 2010, p. 87).

The rather frequent occurrence of M2s1c in the thesis’ introductory chapters in the current study is probably due to the fact that Malaysia has been promoting and encouraging students to be creative and critical citizens. Most educators at all levels, both in schools and universities, acknowledge the country’s vision. Teachers have implemented creative, critical and analytical thinking skills in their classrooms. Therefore, a valid alternative explanation for using the counter-claiming step, though moderate, is the influence of their supervisors. The supervisor(s) of non-native students in overseas universities may pay a lot of attention to the mechanics of thesis writing (Dong, 1998) but supervisors of non-native students in local Malaysian universities also put a premium on structuring the content. Realising the country’s vision, they are expected to encourage students to think critically. Also, since many Malaysian PhD supervisors are trained overseas (at one or more levels of their higher education) in Western universities, it is expected that the Western academic practice of the critical literature review was passed down to their own doctoral students. The importance of the supervisor in moulding a student’s thesis was also pointed out by Dong (1998) in his research on the role of supervisors and non-native students: “The thesis/dissertation advisor has an important role to play in socializing the advisee into the disciplinary community through thesis/dissertation writing supervision” (p. 370). More importantly, they also know that for the thesis to be accepted, it has to be evaluated by academics who are experienced research writers and specialists in the area where critical argument is an essential part of the style of a thesis.

CONCLUSION

Paltridge (2007, p. 83) writes that the Introduction chapter to a thesis is of strategic importance as it “clearly signals the relationship between the specific topic of the thesis and the field of work into which the thesis is being inserted”. The typical understanding of the structure and organisation to accomplish the mentioned purpose draws on Swales’ (1990) CARS model. The three moves are significant in achieving the communicative purpose of the genre. The strategies that shape the convention of the genre, however, operate within the discourse community in which the text is constructed. This study shows that they are not only formulated in the multi-layered contexts of an academic discourse community but also in socio-political and cultural contexts as well.

However, we have to be cautious in making direct assumptions about the influence of national culture on a text so as not to be accused of falling into the ecological fallacy. For instance, we have, in the discussion section, presented some findings by previous researchers regarding the lack of Move 2 in their corpus, who argued that this was to a certain extent the result of one’s religion. Our suggestion for an explanation is simpler, i.e. that at the national level social and political context may also influence the writers, in addition to the organisations and the members of the academic discourse community who are the gatekeepers of the discipline or area of the study. These influences could be analysed from a perspective of their interaction and recursive relationships. This would lead us to analyse the interactions of global and local interpretations of genre requirements, and how local cultural traditions and different disciplines create variations in how globally extensive “genres” are realised in practice. Or they could be analysed from a hierarchical perspective, with a focus on the downward influence of government policy on institutional (university) policy and

culture and so on down to the influence on individual writers. Extensive analysis in either of these two directions is not possible within the constraints of this study, and will have to be taken up at a later stage.

Prior (1994) notes that there is a broad authority running through curricula and examinations that shapes a genre. Prior's (1994) concept of "broad authority" can be inferred to mean the implementation of institutional policies in Malaysia. The institutional policies in Malaysia are linked to various governmental organisations, hence the mission and vision of the country developed at the ministerial level are also integrated in the education system in Malaysia. It is therefore evident that a genre can be very much influenced by the socio-political elements of the country. The indirect influence of government policy on the construction of need as indicated in their niche establishments as well as the significance of the study is a case in point. It shows that education in Malaysia is a powerful political and cultural symbol. Azman and Ahmad (2006) points out that,

In Malaysia, the combined effects of the globalizing markets and the economy and of the scientific and technological revolution have deeply affected Malaysian education policies and perspectives. (p. 80)

The researchers cannot ascertain whether or not this kind of approach would be useful for analysing most, or even a significant proportion, of theses written by Malaysians. It would certainly be important to establish the perceptions of thesis writers themselves and to try to identify the relative importance on them of these overlapping contextual influences. In many cases, the influence of the supervisors is supremely important, but in others relatively minor. Some doctoral students are attuned to the detailed expectations of their disciplines, or at least the characteristics of the literature they have reviewed and the scholarship relevant to their own research topic. For Malaysia, and possibly for most other countries in which doctoral theses are written, it is at this stage difficult to establish the relative importance of these inter-related and overlapping influences on choice of rhetorical strategies.

But it does seem useful to argue that for Malaysia, and possibly for other countries with a strongly utilitarian and instrumental concept of the role of higher degrees in national growth, influences at the national level should be incorporated into further studies of rhetorical strategies employed by thesis writers. We are neither endorsing older approaches to contrastive rhetorical scholarship, nor endorsing studies that employ the ecological fallacy of explaining rhetorical strategies used by individual writers by reference to imputed national cultural characteristics. It is important to note that at this stage of the present of research, the reader's attention must be attuned to the notion that the national level- social and political contexts in Malaysia have a visible impact on these writers' rhetorical strategies, especially the sequence and frequency of their rationales for research and the contexts in which they locate their own research topics. These influences seem to be effected via the expectations of the personnel at various levels in universities and government organisations, including the members of the academic discourse community who are the gatekeepers of the disciplines and topics/area of study considered appropriate.

With the increase in doctoral theses written by ESL and EFL students in recent years, it is important to empower all users of English to use culturally appropriate ways of writing English. It is also pertinent to help native speakers of English understand different expressions of generic conventions to enable greater acceptance of the influence of culturally specific contexts on written academic English.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, U. (1997). Research Article Introductions in Malay: Rhetoric in an Emerging Research Community. In A. Duszak (Ed.). *Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs 104: Culture and Styles of Academic Discourse* (pp. 273-303). New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Amirian, Z., Kassaian, Z., & Tavakoli, M. (2008). Genre Analysis: An Investigation of the Discussion Sections Of Applied Linguistics Research Articles. *The Asian ESP Journal*. 4(1), 39-63.
- Amnuai, W., & Wannaruk, A. (2013). A move-based analysis of the conclusion sections of research articles published in international and Thai journals. *3L: Language Linguistics Literature®*, *Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*. 19(2), 53-63.
- Arulandu, M. (2005). *Genre analysis of dissertation Introductions*. (Unpublished Master's thesis). University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia.
- Azman & Ahmad (2006). History, Trends, and Significant Development of Adult Education in Malaysia. *Historia: Journal of Historical Studies*. VII(2) , 66-82.
- Bunton, D. (2002). Generic Moves in PhD Thesis Introductions. In J. Flowerdew (Ed.). *Academic discourse* (pp. 57-75). London: Longman.
- Burgess, Robert G. (2002). *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*. Routledge.
- Bitchener, J., & Basturkmen, H. (2006). Perceptions of the Difficulties of Postgraduate L2 Thesis Students Writing the Discussion Section. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. 5(1), 4-18.
- Bhatia, V. K. (1997). Genre-mixing in Academic Introductions. *English for Specific Purposes*. 16(3), 181-195.
- Cooley, L. & Lewkowicz, J. (1997). Developing Awareness of the Rhetorical and Linguistic Conventions of Writing a Thesis in English: Addressing the Needs of ESL/EFL Postgraduates Students. In A. Duszak (Ed.). *Culture and Styles Of Academic Discourse* (pp.113-140). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Connor, U. (1999). *Contrastive Rhetoric: Cross-cultural Aspects of Second Language Writing*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Connor, U. (2008). Mapping Multidimensional Aspects of Research: Reaching to Intercultural Rhetoric. In U. Connor, E. Nagelhout & W. Rozycki (Eds.). *Reaching to Intercultural Rhetoric* (pp. 299-315). Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Crocker, R. A. (2009). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. In *Qualitative Research in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 3-24). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Cruse, D. A. (2004). Lexical Facets and Metonymy. *Ilha Do Desterro a Journal of English Language, Literatures in English And Cultural Studies*. 47, 73-96.
- Dong, Y.R. (1998). Non-native Speaker Graduate Students' Thesis/dissertation Writing in Science: Self-reports by Students and their Advisors from Two U.S. Institutions'. *English for Specific Purposes*. 17, 369-390.
- Dudley-Evans & St. John. (1998). *Developments in ESP*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Duszak, A. (Ed.). (1997). *Culture and Styles of Academic Discourse* (Vol. 104). Walter de Gruyter.
- Eason, C.A. (1995). Argumentative essays written by native speakers of Chinese and English: A study in contrastive rhetoric. (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Gow, L., Kember, D., & Chow, R. (1991). The Effects of English Language Ability on Approaches to Learning. *RELC Journal*. 22(1), 49-68.
- Hammersley, M & Atkinson, P. (1983). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Hashim, A. (2008). *How to Write a Thesis: The Thesis Writing Journey from Start to Finish*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Hinds, J. (1982). English and Japanese: A Contrastive Study (1978–1982). *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. 3, 78-84.
- Hirose, K., & Sasaki, M. (1994). Explanatory Variables for Japanese Students' Expository Writing in English: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of Second Language Writing*. 3(3), 203-229.
- Johnstone, B. (1986). Arguments with Khomeni: Rhetorical Situation and Persuasive Style in Cross-cultural Perspective. *Text*. 6(2), 171-187.
- Kamimura, T. & Oi, K. (1998). Argumentative strategies in America and Japanese English. *World Englishes*, 17(3), 307-323.
- Kwan, B.S.C. (2005). *A genre analysis of literature reviews in doctoral theses*. (Unpublished doctoral thesis). City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.
- Kwan, B.S.C. (2006). The Schematic Structure of Literature Reviews in Doctoral Theses of Applied Linguistics. *English for Specific Purposes*. 25, 30-55.
- Koutsantoni, D. (2006). Rhetorical Strategies in Engineering Research Articles and Research Theses: Advanced Academic Literacy and Relations of Power. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. 5(1), 19-36.
- Kember, D., & Gow, L. (1994). Orientations to Teaching and Their Effect on the Quality of Student Learning. *The Journal of Higher Education*. 65(1), 58-74.
- Kobayashi, H. (1984). Rhetorical Patterns in English and Japanese. *TESOL Quarterly*. 18(4), 737-738.
- Lewin, B.A., Fine, J. & Young, L. (2001). *Expository Discourse: A Genre-based Approach to Social Science Research Text*. New York: Continuum.
- Lim, J. M. H. (2012). How Do Writers Establish Research Niches? A Genre-based Investigation Into Management Researchers' Rhetorical Steps and Linguistic Mechanisms. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. 11(3), 229-245.
- Martín, P., & Pérez, I. K. L. (2014). Convincing Peers of the Value of One's Research: a Genre Analysis of Rhetorical Promotion in Academic Texts. *English for Specific Purposes*. 34, 1-13.
- Meurer, J., & Dellagnelo, A. K. (2008). Conclusions as Components of Research Articles Across Portuguese as a Native Language, English as a Native Language and English as a Foreign Language: a Contrastive Genre Study. *The ESpecialist*. 29(2), 233-253.
- Matelene, C. (1985) Contrastive Rhetoric: an American Writing Teacher in China. *Collage Composition*. 47(8), 789-808.
- Morales, R. C. (2012). Conclusions in Research Articles: A Filipino-japanese Contrastive Rhetorical Study. *Philippine ESL Journal*. 8.
- Martín, P., & Pérez, I. K. L. (2014). Convincing Peers of the Value of One's Research: a Genre Analysis of Rhetorical Promotion in Academic Texts. *English for Specific Purposes*. 34, 1-13.
- Moreno, A.I. (2008). The Importance of Comparable Corpora in Cross-cultural Studies. In U. Connor, E. Nagelhout & W. Rozycki (Eds.). *Contrastive Rhetoric: Reaching to Intercultural Rhetoric* (pp. 25- 41). Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Nguyen, T. T. L. & Pramoolsook, I. (2014). Rhetorical Structure of Introduction Chapters Written by Novice Vietnamese Tesol Postgraduates. *3L: Language Linguistics Literature®*, *Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*. 20(1), 61-74.
- Nguyen, T. T. L. & Pramoolsook, I. (2016). Citations in Literature Review Chapters of TESOL Master's Theses by Vietnamese Postgraduates. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*. 16(2),17-32
- Ostler, S. E. (1987). English in Parallels: A Comparison of English and Arabic Prose. *Writing Across Languages: Analysis of L2 Text*. 169-185.
- Paltridge, B. (2007). *Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum.
- Paltridge, B. & Starfield, S. (2007). *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language- a Handbook for Supervisors*. New York: Routledge.
- Prior, P. (1994). Response, Revision, Disciplinary: A Microhistory of a Dissertation Prospectus in Sociology. *Written Communication*. 11, 483-533.
- Samraj, B. (2002). Texts and Contextual Layers: Academic Writing in Content Courses. In Johns, A.M. (Ed.). *Genre in the Classroom* (pp. 163-177). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Sheldon, E. (2011). Rhetorical Differences in Ra Introductions Written by English L1 and L2 and Castilian Spanish L1 Writers. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. 10(4), 238-251.
- Soler-Monreal, C., Carbonell-Olivares, M., & Gil-Salom, L. (2011). A Contrastive Study of the Rhetorical Organisation of English and Spanish Phd Thesis Introductions. *English for Specific Purposes*. 30(1), 4-17.
- Swales, J.M. (1990). *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (1994). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills: A Course for Nonnative Speakers of English (English for Specific Purposes)*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1999). *Handbook of Creativity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, C. N. L. S. A., & Thompson, R. M. (1982). The discourse motivation for the perfect aspect: the Mandarin particle *le*. In *Tense-aspect: Between Semantics & Pragmatics: Containing the Contributions to a Symposium on Tense and Aspect, Held at UCLA, May 1979* (Vol. 1, p. 19). John Benjamins Publishing.
- Werle, A. (2007). A Typology of Negative Indefinites. *University of Massachusetts, Amherst*.
- Zhang, Y. & Hu, J. (2010). A Genre-based Study of Medical Research Article Introductions: a Contrastive Analysis Between Chinese and English. *The Asian ESP Journal*. 6(1), 72-96.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Siti Zaidah Zainuddin (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya. Her primary research interests lie in discourse studies particularly genre analysis in both written and spoken academic discourse as well as corpus linguistics.

Azianura Hani Shaari (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer at the Sustainability of Language Sciences Research Center, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM. She teaches Sociolinguistics as well as Language, Culture and Communication at both graduate and undergraduate levels. She has received several awards throughout her career and has published many articles in both local and international journals.