TESOL Master's Theses in Vietnam: Relationship between abstracts and introductions

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Abstract

Although abstracts and introductions, which form a genre set in research articles, are reported to be related, few studies have explored their relationship in master's theses or doctoral dissertations, especially those written in English by non-native English writers. Employing Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework for analyzing master's theses, this study showed the relationship between abstracts and introductions of 24 TESOL master's theses written by Vietnamese students. Move 1 of these abstracts contained some identical information to that included in three moves of the introductions. A closer look at the overlapping points and the interview information from thesis writers and thesis supervisors revealed that these writers were inexperienced and tended to follow the way to write the introductions in composing the abstracts. These findings suggest that an appropriate amount of explicit, genre-based instruction is necessary to make these Vietnamese writers aware of the relationship between these two genres.

Key words: Abstracts, introductions, Vietnamese writers, master's thesis, TESOL, rhetorical structures, relationship, genre analysis

1. Introduction

The macro-organization and the linguistic features of research article (RA) abstracts and introductions have been investigated quite extensively (Bhatia, 1993; Crookes, 1986; Hirano, 2009; Hyland, 2000; Lorés, 2004; Ozturk, 2007; Pho, 2008, 2009; Salager-Meyer, 1992; Samraj, 2002; Santos, 1996; Suntara & Usaha, 2013; Swales, 1990, 2004; Zhang, Bui, & Pramoolsook, 2012). Although these two genres share similar "contextual figuration", namely, the same research setting, the same channel of communication (written mode), similar participant relationship, the same writer and the same level of formality, they still remain distinct as genres because they have different communicative purposes, and should thus display different rhetorical structures (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). According to Hyland (2000), the RA abstract is representative of the whole article, while the RA introduction marks a link between what has gone before in the relevant field of research and the present work (Bhatia, 1993). This is the reason why discussions of previous studies are rarely found in RA abstracts, whereas they are an important part of RA introductions. Besides the difference in communicative purposes of these two genres, some indications of the present research, namely, methodology, experimental procedures, data collection and analysis, and reporting of findings are important in RA abstracts, while such information rarely appears in RA introductions. Swales (1990) asserts that the RA abstract is meant to tell all the important aspects of the research report, while the RA introduction states the motivations of the present research and justifies its publication.

Since abstracts and introductions in theses/dissertations share the same communicative purposes with those of RAs, they tend to be inseparable because they are always read together with the following chapters in order to evaluate the reported research. In fact, although an abstract appears to be a preface to both a thesis/dissertation and a RA, and provides brief information about what the author(s) did, how the author(s) did that, what the author(s) found out, and lastly, what suggestions or conclusions the author(s) want to provide, a RA abstract assists readers by giving an overview which shows whether or not the accompanying paper is worth the reader's further attention (Hyland, 2000). Readers of thesis/dissertation abstracts, a very small group of specialists in the field, namely, thesis supervisor(s) and committee members, on the other hand, seem to continue their reading of the following parts of a thesis/dissertation in order to evaluate the worthiness of the research reported. The difference in the readership between RAs and theses/dissertations is likely due to their different communicative purposes. For the latter, their communicative purposes are to convince the graduate committee that thesis/dissertation writers have completed an independent study by showing their familiarity with the knowledge of the specialized field and research skills, and to prove that they are qualified for a degree through their completed work. Furthermore, writing theses/dissertations is a learning process, which is shown by detailed presentation of propositions in chapters, whereas more concise sections are required in RAs. Moreover, due to their function as consolidation of the content of the accompanying paper and their quality as a time saving device for readers in judging the merit of a RA, RA abstracts have attracted a large number of studies, while there are few investigations on abstracts of theses/dissertations (Chen & Kuo, 2012; Swales, 2004).

Bhatia (1993) claims that RA abstracts and introductions share a common aspect, namely, introducing the present research. In particular, the last move of the introduction, i.e. *introducing present research/occupying the niche/presenting the present work* in Swales' (1981, 1990, 2004) CARS model, respectively, reappears as Move 1, *introducing purpose*, of the abstract. It is also interesting to note that although Swales modified the CARS model two times, the last move in the model still focuses on the same aspect, the present work. Bhatia (1993) states that "the RA introduction ends where the abstract begins" and this is the only point of overlap between these two genres (p. 82). Given the differences in communicative purposes, but the similar contextual configurations and the overlapping points between these two genres in RAs, this study attempts to explore the relationship between abstracts and introductions in theses/dissertations written by Vietnamese M.A. students, who learn English as a foreign language.

Samraj (2005) studied the relationship between RA abstracts and RA introductions in two related disciplines, Conservation Biology and Wildlife Behavior. Her findings indicate that these two genres are differently interrelated in these two disciplines and their rhetorical organizations and communicative purposes "may not always be distinctive" (p. 151). For example, while the genres of abstracts and introductions in Wildlife Behavior show a great distinction in their communicative purposes and their overall organization, there is a similarity in the communicative purpose and the rhetorical organization of both the Conservation Biology abstracts and introductions. Her findings are quite different from Bhatia's (1993) in terms of the distinctive communicative purposes and rhetorical structures of these two genres. Samraj (2005) credits this difference to their nature. That is, Conservation Biology is an emerging, interdisciplinary and applied field in which more explicit explanations and justifications for the context and research motivation should be provided in order to promote the reported research as valuable, while Wildlife Behavior is a mature research area with a central body of theory shared by scientists in the field. Similarly,

the study on rhetorical structures between RA abstracts and introductions in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics by Suntara (2013) also revealed the high frequency of common points, namely, *purposes, methods* and *research contexts*, between these two genres. The only difference between these text types in her study is the absence of the overlapping point of the *product/outcome* move in these two related disciplines. While 12 instances of overlapping of the *product/outcome* move were found in the Linguistics abstracts and introductions, there was no repeated information of the *Results* move in RA abstracts and introductions in Applied Linguistics, leading to a complete absence of overlapping points between these two genres in this field. In contrast, Pho's (2009) study on the rhetorical structures and linguistic features of the moves in RA abstracts and introductions in the fields of Applied Linguistics and Educational Technology indicates distinctive move structures between these two genres, although their linguistic features were found to be similar across the two disciplines.

Although these findings indicate the variations in the relationship between abstracts and introductions, their focus is only on these two genres in RAs. Although theses are a very different genre from RAs (Dudley-Evans, 1999; Samraj, 2008; Swales, 1990, 2004; Thompson, 2001), little research has been conducted on doctoral dissertations and M.A. theses (Bunton, 2002, 2005; Chen & Kuo, 2012; Dudley-Evans, 1986; Hewings, 1993; Kwan, 2006). Moreover, as cited in Chen and Kuo (2012), despite a large number of manuals and guidebooks for thesis/dissertation writing, "very few of them are based on empirical research or focus on a specific discipline" (p. 25). In addition, writing a thesis in English poses problems for non-native English speaking students (Dong, 1998; Paltridge, 2002; Shaw, 1991), and Pho (2009) adds that writing a good abstract and introduction can be a challenge to novice writers. Despite these difficulties, as revealed in the interviews with thesis writers and their supervisors, TESOL M.A. students in Vietnam have little or no formal instruction on how to write each part of a thesis, but are provided with guidelines. These students just consult the guidelines, published books on thesis writing, or theses written by students in previous courses in their school library, and then format their own theses. Take the guidelines for the thesis abstract and introduction chapter provided by universities with a TESOL M.A. program in the South of Vietnam as an example (Appendix A). Their information structures include all accepted conventional elements of these two genres in the literature. However, Paltridge (2002) finds that guidelines and handbooks which focus on thesis writing do not show students the range of thesis options, nor do they provide the rationale for the various choices thesis writers make. He also argues that thesis writing is a difficult process, even for native English writers, because writers need to possess a good level of language proficiency and textual, genre and social knowledge. These problems aside, there tends to be a scarcity of studies on the relationships between abstracts and introductions in M.A. theses written in English, especially by non-native English students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to empirically examine how these two genres interact in terms of their rhetorical structures within a set of TESOL M.A. theses composed by Vietnamese students. Furthermore, comparing the set in terms of these two genres is expected to add to our knowledge of how non-native English writers write each genre and whether or not they start their abstracts where their introductions end, as claimed in the RA abstracts and introductions (Bhatia, 1993).

2. Data and method

Two corpora of 24 M.A. thesis abstracts and their 24 corresponding introductions (46,882 words) written in English during the years 2009–2012 by Vietnamese students in TESOL served as the primary data for the current study. They were in electronic forms and were randomly obtained from the libraries of all three universities providing this M.A. program

(eight from each) in the South of Vietnam. In Vietnam there are seven universities that have been permitted to provide the TESOL M.A. program in English for Vietnamese teachers of English. Due to the inaccessibility of the libraries of the other four universities with the TESOL M.A. program in the Central and the North of Vietnam, only TESOL M.A. theses in the three universities in the South of Vietnam were selected for the present study. In these universities, all M.A. students who have passed the thesis defense are required to submit the final revised versions of their theses to the school libraries. Theses in the library database of these universities, therefore, are regarded as standard and accepted ones in TESOL discourse communities in Vietnam. Moreover, only the theses produced during the 2009-2012 period in the South of Vietnam were selected since generic structures are subject to variation across time and this selection of theses is expected to reflect the current practice of thesis writing by this group of M.A. students in this part of Vietnam. After permission was obtained from the heads of the English departments, the researchers then contacted the thesis writers for their permission for the use of their theses. After receiving the thesis writers' permission, the researchers informed the librarians or the program coordinators, and the electronic theses were sent to the researchers. To create a corpus, each abstract and introduction was first randomly coded from number A1 to A24, and I1 to I24, respectively, for the ease of reference and the anonymity of thesis writers. Finally, the abstracts and introductions were analyzed using the model revised by Chen and Kuo (2012) (Appendices B and C). These frameworks integrated and modified various previous move-step investigations such as Lorés' (2004) for the abstracts, and Bunton's (2002) for introductions. Among three kinds of abstracts in Lorés (2004), the informative one was chosen in Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework. Besides the newly added move of *Referring to other studies* with three functions (steps), the framework for analyzing introductions suggested by Chen and Kuo (2012) includes three moves and all the steps indicated as both "often present" and "occasionally present" in Bunton's (2002) modified CARS model. Although some steps in this framework, namely, *Announcing research work earned out*, *Indicating research method, Indicating applications* and *Indicating model proposed* were reworded or modified from the original ones (*Work carried out*, *Materials or Subjects, Application of product,* and *Product of research/Model proposed*, respectively), their communicative purposes are identical to those in Bunton (2002). Chen and Kuo (2012) indicate that renaming and modifying of these steps were done to suit the nature of theses in Applied Linguistics while those steps in Bunton's were found across both soft and hard disciplines.

For the data analysis, the introduction chapters were analyzed first since it is believed that these chapters are written prior to the abstracts (Samraj, 2005). After that, the abstracts were analyzed by first employing Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework for the abstract, and then by drawing on moves/steps found in the related introductions in order to examine whether similar moves/steps had been found in the abstracts. In this way, the relationship between abstracts and introductions in the M.A. theses could be clarified. Moreover, the criteria suggested by Kanoksilapatham (2005) were employed for interpreting the frequency of the moves and steps found in the two corpora. According to her, if a particular move or step occurs in every thesis (100%), it is classified as "obligatory". If a move or step is found below 60% in the corpus, it is regarded as "optional" and if the occurrence of a certain move or step ranges from 60-99%, it is "conventional". Since move analysis involves a certain degree of subjectivity (Crookes, 1986), inter-raters were employed in this study in order to ensure the reliability of the findings. Two researchers, who hold a doctoral degree and specialize in corpus-based analysis, analyzed the texts in this corpus separately, yielding high inter-rater reliability rates (96% and 94% for Abstracts and Introductions, respectively).

Apart from the genre-based analysis of these texts, another set of data was also included to enrich the findings of the proposed research. Interviews with six thesis writers and three supervisors who were involved in the process of writing these theses were expected to provide clarifications and insightful understanding regarding various aspects of the writing process of this genre in the social context in the discourse community in Vietnam (Biber, Connor, & Upton, 2007). This "discourse-based interview" process followed the tradition of validation and providing clarifications of writing practice in genre analysis (Dong, 1998; Flowerdew, 1999a, 1999b; Hyland, 2000; Okamura, 2006; Shaw, 1991; Thompson, 2001). In this study, semi-structured interviews with open-ended prompts which focused on the findings from the text analysis were conducted with six thesis writers on the grounds of their availability (two thesis writers from each university with the TESOL M.A. program) (Appendix D). The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese as this encouraged them to express what they really thought about the questions. All interviews were recorded and subsequently checked with participants where clarification was needed. However, only the information that helped clarify the issues related to the thesis writing process were translated and included as excerpts throughout the texts with the aim of shedding more light on how this group of M.A. students composed these two thesis genres in the TESOL discourse community in Vietnam.

3. Results and discussion
3.1 Overview of abstract and introduction rhetorical structures
3.1.1 Abstracts
As can be seen in Table 1 below, abstracts in TESOL M.A. theses in Vietnam generally contain four moves: *Introduction, Method, Results* and *Conclusions*, but the first two moves (*Introduction* and *Method*) are obligatory while *Results* and *Conclusions* moves are conventional (96% and 83%, respectively). In fact, one abstract in this current corpus (A23) does not have the *Results* move, and the interview with this thesis writer (T23) showed that she intentionally omitted it because the abstract was her last part to write, so it seemed to repeat what she had mentioned in the conclusions if the results were included in the abstract. Moreover, she admitted that since her supervisor and the committee members did not comment or criticize the exclusion of the results in her abstract, she kept it as it was after thesis defense. Although the absence of the Results move in one abstract of the current corpus confirms the results of Santos (1996) and Chen and Kuo (2012), in which the *Summarizing the finding/Results* move was found to be optional, this writer's purpose in excluding this move is likely to indicate her unawareness of the communicative purposes of abstracts. As can be seen in Example 1, this abstract had the key word "findings", but no specific research results were provided.

(1) *"The **findings** are found and **recommendations** are made to better the students' English speaking skill. The study, therefore, not only provides the teachers of English at the International School with possibilities to improve the students' oral practice of English, but also makes positive contributions to school management."* (A23)

Table 1: Overlapping points between introductions and abstracts in TESOL M.A. theses in Vietnam

Introductions		Abstracts	
Moves & Steps	**Total** n(%)	**Moves & Steps**	**Total** n(%)
Move 1: Establishing a Territory (T)	**24 (100)**	**Move 1: Introduction**	**24 (100)**
Providing topic generalization/background	22 (92)	Introducing the topic/background	13 (54)
Indicating centrality/importance of topic	19 (79)	Claiming the importance	11 (46)

Move 2: Establishing a Niche (N)	**22 (92)**		
Indicating gaps in previous research	11 (46)	Indicating gaps	6 (25)
Question-raising	3 (13)		
Indicating a problem/need	21 (88)	Indicating a need	1 (4)
Move 3: Occupying the Niche (O)	**24 (100)**		
Indicating purposes/aims/objectives	24 (100)	Indicating purpose	22 (92)
Indicating scope of research	11 (46)		
Indicating chapter/section structure	12 (50)		
Indicating theoretical position	2 (8)		
Stating research questions/hypotheses	15 (63)	Research questions/hypothesis	4 (17)
		Move 2: Method	**24 (100)**
Defining terms	3 (13)		
Indicating research method	3(13)	Subjects	21 (88)
		Research context	13 (54)
		Data collection	24 (100)
		Data analysis	6 (25)
Indicating findings/results	0 (0)	**Move 3: Results**	**23 (96)**
		Move 4: Conclusions	**20 (83)**
Indicating applications	9 (38)	Teaching applications	13 (54)
Indicating value or significance	16 (67)	Significance of the study	5 (21)
		Suggestions for future studies	5 (21)
		Summary of the results	2 (8)
Indicating thesis structure	20 (80)		
Referring to other studies	13 (54)		
+ Providing background information	9 (38)		
+ Providing support or justification	21 (88)		
** Summarizing the chapter	2 (8)		
** Introducing the next chapter content	1 (4)		

*- Numbers in the **Total** columns indicate the number of abstracts/introductions in which a particular move/step was found and the round-number percentage of its occurrences in the corpus.*
- The steps under each move of abstracts were recorded by the researchers for the comparative purpose of this study.
- (**) the newly identified steps in the M.A. introduction chapters of this corpus

In addition, the findings on move structures of abstracts in theses written by Vietnamese are different from Pho's (2008) results, which revealed that *Presenting the research*, *Describing the methodology* and *Summarizing the findings* moves were obligatory in the abstracts of RAs. She also credits the absence of the *Summarizing the findings* move in some abstracts in Santos' (1996) study to the type of theoretical RAs in his corpus. Apart from this, an increasing trend in the occurrence of *Results* and *Conclusions* moves in abstracts suggested by Hyland (2000) was recorded in this study. Besides the move/step structures, similar findings to those of Chen & Kuo (2012) were a linear structure of *Introduction-Method-Results-Conclusions* and an infrequent occurrence of move cycling found in these TESOL M.A. thesis abstracts. In addition to these, four instances of citations were seen in three out of these 24 abstracts and this is likely to suggest that these non-native writers of M.A. theses in TESOL follow the convention of not including citations in the abstracts in the literature.

3.1.2 Introductions
Twenty two introductions (almost 92%) had all the three moves in Chen & Kuo's (2012) framework, i.e. *Establishing a Territory (T)*, *Establishing a Niche (N)*, and *Occupying the Niche (O)*. This can be explained by the fact that these writers simply followed the guidelines for thesis writing provided by their universities (Appendix A). This conformity to the model is likely to reflect the way Vietnamese have been trained at school where conforming to the norms or patterns is practiced. Furthermore, the presence of Move 2 in 22 (out of 24) introductions of TESOL M.A. theses written by Vietnamese conforms to the characteristic of

those in Samraj (2008), who indicated that of the three disciplines (Philosophy, Biology and Linguistics), only the Linguistics introductions consistently had the second move.

In terms of move cycles, 11 introductions (46%) in the present corpus had a single progression (T-N-O), where the writers reviewed previous research, and then pointed out gaps or problems, and finally went on to announce their own research in the following sections labeled *Indicating purposes/aims/objectives, Stating research questions/hypotheses, Indicating value or significance* and *Indicating thesis structure*. Swales (2004) indicates that these "*straight-shot*" introductions can be regarded as more attainable to novice writers, which these M.A. thesis writers in Vietnam belong to. However, the sequence of moves T-N, followed by either T-O or T-N-O was identified as well in the other 13 introductions in the corpus. This practice of move cycles corresponds to the literature which states that the moves in the introduction chapters are cyclical (Bunton, 2002; Crookes, 1986). Closer examinations of these 13 introductions revealed that the cycles of *providing topic generalization/background* (Move 1) in a single thesis introduction were due to the fact that the background of a specific research setting was given after the topic generalization regarding the research topic was provided.

3.2 Relationship between abstracts and introductions
Besides the overall structures of abstracts and introductions of TESOL M.A. theses, Table 1 above also displays the overlapping points between these two genres. Move 1 (*Introduction*) in the abstracts contained some identical information to Moves 1, 2 and 3 in the introductions. Besides the overlapping points, namely, *purpose, method*, and *significance,* in the traditional moves in this genre set of abstracts and introductions, the current study identified some interesting repetitions. First, the presence of *providing the topic generalization/background* and of *indicating importance of topic* found in half of this abstract corpus (13 and 11 abstracts, respectively) is similar to Samraj's (2005) finding in the genre set of RA abstracts and introductions in Conservation Biology. In particular, the presence of these two rhetorical functions (topic generalization and centrality claim) in an introduction is "paralleled" in an abstract of the set in her study. Moreover, it is interesting to mention here that the presence of these two steps in Move 1 of the abstracts in the current study could account for the lengthy abstracts in this corpus because the language used for these two steps in the abstract is almost the same as that in the introduction, as shown in Example 2 below.

(2) "*With the tendency of globalization and world integration, English becomes an important bridge to help people all over the world understand one another. To contribute to that success, the role of English textbook should be paid attention to. However, since its introduction into high schools in 2006-2007 up till now, the English textbook for the 10th graders in general and its reading skill in particular have not been systematically evaluated, supported by empirical evidence.*
To help evaluate the reading materials in this English language textbook, a theoretical framework of textbook evaluation was shaped. The evaluation was limited to text selection in terms of length, type, authenticity, culture, integration into other skills, and topic, and task design dealing with the pre-, while-, and post-reading activities…." (A20)

(2) "*.... Therefore, the role of English becomes more and more important, as it is a bridge to enhance mutual understanding and relationship among countries…. The development of the country as well as the change of the English textbook for the period from 1986 up till now can be divided into two stages:...Since its introduction into high schools, there have been both favorable and unfavorable opinions .....*" (I20)

Moreover, as can also be seen in Example 2, a one-paragraph allocation for one move was identified in 15 abstracts in this corpus, and among these 15 abstracts, five abstracts have five paragraphs, of which two or even three paragraphs are for establishing the importance of their research topics in the *Introduction* Move. Although the long *Introduction* Move in the current abstract corpus reflects Hyland's (2000) claims of the disciplinary distinctiveness of the soft discipline that these TESOL M.A theses belong to, the interviews with the actual thesis writers showed that they were unaware of the rhetorical functions of abstracts. As stated by a thesis writer (T17), the abstract is the summary of the whole thesis; the content of each chapter was summarized in a paragraph. In addition, he also admitted that despite the guidelines provided by the university, he formatted the abstract himself based on his viewing abstracts of previous theses. However, because there was no negative feedback or comments from his supervisor or the committee, he assumed that a one paragraph allocation for each move in an abstract is a good model.

Another interesting result found in the abstracts of the corpus is the absence of the purpose of the reported research in the *Introduction* move of 2 abstracts (A12 and A21). Lorés (2004), whose framework for RA abstract analysis has been modified by Chen and Kuo (2012) to analyze the abstracts of M.A. theses in Applied Linguistics, indicates that the author's purpose, objective, or goal of the research is presented in the *Introduction* move of informative abstracts. The lack of this communicative purpose in the two abstracts of the TESOL M.A. corpus in Vietnam rendered these abstracts incomplete and thus reduced their effectiveness. Besides the absence of the author's purpose in conducting the reported research, the current corpus contains six abstracts (25%) with the gap/need indication, followed by the purpose step in the *Introduction* move. Interestingly, however, the research gap/need was repeated in Move 2 of the accompanying introductions, as shown in Example 3) below. The interview with a thesis writer (T8) whose abstract indicated the research gap revealed that among the abstracts of previous theses he read, this type of abstract sounded the most effective and it was chosen as a model for his abstract writing (Excerpt 1). Besides gap indication, the language employed for this communicative purpose in these two genres of some abstracts was almost identical (Example 3).

 (3) *Vocabulary is admitted to be one of the most important components in learning a foreign language…. Although many studies have been made on teaching vocabulary, very few of them concentrated on teaching vocabulary to elementary adult learners at a foreign language center. The aim of the study was to explore the major difficulties in teaching vocabulary to elementary adult learners at the foreign language center of USSH.* (A8)

(3) *In Vietnam, it is known that there have been many studies done on teaching and learning vocabulary recently. For instance,… However, none of them have concentrated on the context of a foreign language center of USSH...* (I8)

(Excerpt 1) *"I wasn't aware of the rhetorical effect of employing the gap indication in the abstract, but among the abstracts I reviewed, this way of writing attracted me the most."* (T 8)

The inclusion of *hypothesis* and *research questions* in four abstracts (17% of the corpus) was another interesting finding that possibly supported the researchers' assumption about these writers' inexperience or their following the conventions of writing an introduction in writing an abstract since the same research questions and hypothesis reappeared in the introduction, as shown in Example 4 below. Given the limited number of words in an abstract as a synopsis (Bhatia, 1993) and an advance indicator of the content and structure of the accompanying text

(Swales, 1990), the presence of these elements seems to be inappropriate. However, like the finding from the interview regarding the gap indication, the abstract model the thesis writers chose containing research questions accounted for their presence in the thesis abstracts. One thesis writer provided his further explanation for the inclusion of research questions in his abstract in Excerpt 2. In general, the information from the interviews tends to suggest that these thesis writers relied much on models in formatting their own texts without being aware of the rhetorical effects or having a rationale for their choices.

(Excerpt 2) *"...the research questions were used as a way to state my research aims and without them, my abstract would be very short....Anything wrong with this? ...From my reading previous theses, I have seen some abstracts with research questions..."* (T1)

(4) *Language and culture is inseparable, and the integration of culture teaching in language teaching has been widely recognized..... However, the perception of the role of culture in English language teaching (ELT) varies...... Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore teachers' beliefs about the role of culture in ELT and classroom practices at..., with three guiding research questions: (1) What beliefs about the role of culture in ELT do EL teachers hold? (2) How do they define the objectives of culture teaching?   And (3) To what extent are their beliefs reflected in their classroom practices?* (A1)

(4) *In order to achieve those objectives, the following research questions must be addressed:*
1. What beliefs about the role of culture in ELT do EL teachers hold?
2. How do they define the objectives of culture teaching?
3. To what extent are their beliefs reflected in their classroom practices? (I1)

In contrast, in the interview with his thesis supervisor, it was learnt that the inclusion of long research questions is not common in his discourse community and the supervisee was advised to make changes to the way he had written his abstract. The mistake still existed, however, because due to his trust of his supervisee and his time constraint, the supervisor did not check that abstract after it was revised. This information from the interviews with both the thesis writer and his supervisor suggests that formal and explicit instructions should be provided to novice thesis writers with the aim of familiarizing them with the rhetorical functions of abstracts and rationale for writers' various choices in constructing the abstract.

As shown in Table 1, three overlapping instances of *Method* were identified in the abstracts and the introductions, but a closer look at these indicated that this information is usually stated at the beginning of the introduction as a chapter introduction and an indication of chapter structure, without a section heading, such as in the following:

(5*) This thesis reports the study which was done on 104 third-year students at X University. The study purposed to explore…. The study also surveyed students' attitudes towards…..* (A19)

(5) *This thesis reports the results of the study which was done on 104 third-year university students at X University. The study aimed to examine…. This chapter presents (1.1) rationale, (1.2) theoretical background, (1.3) the purpose of the study…..and (1.9) the chapter summary.* (I19)

Similar to the findings in Chen & Kuo (2012), the *Method* move in the abstracts of the TESOL M.A. theses described the research context and/or process, especially the participants, data collection, and analysis. However, the way such information was composed in a majority of these TESOL abstracts was likely to be wordy, as can be seen in

Example 6 below, resulting not only in the long text but also an unsuccessful abstract if it is submitted for publication.

(6) *As for the framework of analysis, the study examines the textual patterning of more than 2000 essays by Vietnamese students who were enrolled in TOEFL iBT training programs at one foreign language center. In addition, it also utilizes various other research tools such as interviews, surveys, and observations to attain its goals. There are more than 200 students and teachers involved in the survey, of whom about 10 teachers presented their viewpoints in interviews. Furthermore, data collected from the observation of actual class activities also contribute to the analysis in this thesis.* (A2)

Together with the lengthy process of presenting the *Method* move, more than half of the abstracts (Table 1) in the corpus had a detailed description of the context where the reported research had been conducted despite the concise nature of an abstract. As can be seen in Example 7 below, the research context served to establish the niche the reported research was to occupy. It is also worth mentioning here that such information about the research context was found in greater length in the introduction of the same thesis.

(7) *Learning English through its literature has been proved to bear sweet fruits to learners of English. This is especially more important to those whose major is English Linguistics and Literature. For that reason, American/British Literature has long been introduced to major students of the Department of English Linguistics and Literature (DELL) – USSH – Ho Chi Minh City. In the academic school year 2010 – 2011, hard as the authority had tried, this subject did not seem to catch the students' attention as much as it had been expected to. Literature appeared to be a dwarf among the other giants: Translation and Interpretation, and Linguistics and Language Training, and was the least chosen major among the students. This thesis, therefore, was firstly to re-investigate the interest in learning American/British Literature of the DELL majors in USSH, specifically in the academic school year 2010 – 2011....* (A3)

Finally, there was no overlapping point in Move 3 (*Results*) of abstracts with that in introductions of these TESOL M.A. theses. This confirms Suntara's (2013) finding, which indicated that there was no repeated information about results between RA abstracts and introductions in Applied Linguistics while this move was repeated in Linguistics introductions. This could, therefore, be claimed to be due to their similarity in the field of study (TESOL and Applied Linguistics, respectively), and the nature of the soft applied discipline that the texts of both studies belong to.

A closer examination of the *Conclusions* move of these TESOL abstracts revealed another similar finding to Chen & Kuo's (2012), where the "promising step" of providing teaching applications was given in 13 abstracts (54%). However, the significance of the thesis research was used in only five abstracts, as illustrated in Example 8 below, while 16 introductions indicated the value of the reported research in a separate section under the heading *Significance/Importance of the study*. Moreover, besides *Teaching applications* and *Significance of the study*, the *Suggestions for further studies* step was also found in the *Conclusions* move of five abstracts. The last finding on the *Conclusions* move seems to reflect both the communicative purposes of an abstract as a summary of the whole thesis that these M.A. writers in Vietnam had in mind as revealed in the interview, and their lack of knowledge in composing this text genre.

(8) *The results, although tentative, contribute to an understanding of the reality of using CLT at FLC-USSH and provide suggestions for the concerned bodies to facilitate the process of applying this teaching method in this institution. The thesis closes by identifying some possible future research in relation to this study.* (A7)

4. Conclusions

As indicated by previous studies (Dudley-Evans, 1999; Paltridge, 2002; Samraj, 2008; Swales, 1990, 2004; Thompson, 2001), little was known about the genre of theses/dissertations from a discoursal point of view due to the problem of accessibility, daunting length, and disciplinary variations. Based on the framework by Chen and Kuo (2012), this study attempts to describe the relationship between abstracts and introductions of 24 M.A. theses in the field of TESOL in Vietnam in terms of move structures and sequence patterns.

The results of this study showed that abstracts in TESOL M.A. theses written by Vietnamese research participants do not begin where the introductions end as has been claimed about these two genres in RAs (Bhatia, 1993), but they include some overlapping points. In this research, Move 1 in these abstracts was found to contain some identical information, namely, introducing the topic/background, claiming the importance, indicating the gap/need, purpose, and research questions/hypothesis to Moves 1, 2, and 3 of the introductions. However, it is interesting to emphasize here that these pieces of information were presented in the set of these two genres in almost the same language structures and manner, which make these abstracts almost twice as long as those written by international writers from ProQuest (Chen & Kuo, 2012) (an average length of 265 and 164, respectively). Moreover, such long abstracts tend not to be effective as a synopsis (Bhatia, 1993) and an advance indicator of the content and structure of the accompanying text (Swales, 1990) in academic writing. Besides the overlapping points found in Move 1 of these abstracts and Moves 1, 2, and 3 of the introductions, the present study also identified the repeated information in Move 2 (*Method*) and Move 4 (*Conclusions*) between these two genres. Although abstracts are supposed to be brief, the information about the research context was found to be lengthily presented in more than half of the abstracts (13 abstracts) in the corpus. Moreover, in addition to the repeated points of teaching applications and significance of the thesis research in these two genres, the presence of the promising step of providing recommendations for further study in the *Conclusions* move of these abstracts and the "straight-shot" introductions (Swales, 2004) seems to suggest that this group of novice M.A. students in Vietnam are non-expert in composing the set of these two genres in their M.A. theses. The information collected from the interviews with thesis writers and their supervisors also indicated that these thesis writers in Vietnam were inexperienced in composing their own theses and theses written by previous M.A. students served as text samples on which they relied in formatting theirs.

Despite the small and local scale of the study, our findings, to a certain extent, can provide a general picture of how non-native English writers in Vietnam compose the set of these two genres of their M.A. theses in English. As writing a thesis in English is challenging for non-native English speaking students (Dong, 1998; Paltridge, 2002; Shaw, 1991), this group of Vietnamese writers should be formally instructed on how to compose it. Moreover, our findings on the relationship between abstracts and introductions of their theses suggest that they need to be made aware that abstracts may not just be a synopsis of the whole thesis but may also contain rhetorical moves/steps commonly found in introductions. However, these writers should also be informed that the overlapping points identified in the set of these two

genres do not promote the repetition of identical and lengthy texts from an introduction in their writing of an abstract of the set. An appropriate amount of explicit, genre-based instruction with a clear focus on how to compose these two genres in a set may, therefore, need to be introduced into the classroom with the aim of helping this group of non-native writers in Vietnam be aware of their relationship. With raised awareness of this rhetorical practice, these Vietnamese writers are expected to produce these two genres in a conscientious and effective manner in their future academic writing, especially in writing for publication. Indeed, knowing how to effectively write these genres in their M.A. theses can, to some extent, help them to compose a similar, but more demanding text, a RA, when they would like to get their work published in the future.

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Appendix
Appendix A: An extract of thesis guidelines provided by universities with a TESOL M.A. program in Vietnam (with a focus on the Abstract and Introduction)

Required length
The university requires the writing and acceptance of a master's thesis of approximately 20,000 words (but not more than 45,000 words)
Typing specifications
    …..
The major features of a thesis
- Cover page
- Title page
- Statement of authority/ Certificate of originality (a declaration that the thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree or similar award at another institution)
- Retention and use of the thesis (optional)
- Acknowledgements
- Abstract
- Table of contents
- List of figures
- List of tables
- List of abbreviations and symbols
- Introduction
- Chapters in sequence
- Conclusion
- Bibliography
- Appendices

Abstract
An abstract is a concise summary of the thesis, intended to inform prospective readers about its contents. The abstract indicates the problem investigated, the procedures followed, the general result obtained and the major conclusions reached. It should not contain any illustrative material or tables.
Chapter 1: Introduction
The introduction may include an explanation of author's own background and motivation to undertake this particular piece of research. The introduction should end with the general question which the thesis sets out to answer.
The introduction can include the following:
    - Background to the study
    - Statement of purpose/Rationale of the study
    - Research questions
    - Significance of the study
    - Overview of thesis chapters

Appendix B: Chen and Kuo (2012) framework for abstract chapters of M.A. theses in applied linguistics

Move 1: Introduction
Move 2: Method
Move 3: Results
Move 4: Conclusions

Appendix C: Chen and Kuo (2012) framework for introduction chapters of M.A theses in applied linguistics)

Moves	Steps
Move 1: Establishing a territory (T)	• Providing topic generalization/background • Indicating centrality/importance of topic • Defining terms • Reviewing previous research
Move 2: Establishing a niche (N)	• Indicating gap in previous research • Question-raising • Counter-claiming • Continuing/extending a tradition • Indicating a problem/need
Move 3: Occupying the niche (O)	• Indicating purposes/aims/objectives • Indicating scope of research • Indicating chapter/section structure • Indicating theoretical position • Announcing research work earned out • Describing parameters of research • Stating research questions/hypotheses • Defining terms • Indicating research method • Indicating findings/ results • Indicating models proposed • Indicating applications • Indicating value or significance • Providing justification • Indicating thesis structure
Referring to other studies	• Providing background information • Providing definition of terms • Providing support or justification

Appendix D: Interview questions
<u>Students (Thesis writers)</u>
1. How long should an M.A. thesis abstract be in your discourse community?
2. What did you mention in the abstract: the problem investigated, research gaps, hypothesis/research questions, the procedures followed, the general result obtained and the major conclusions reached?
3. Where do you think the research gaps should be included: in the abstract or introduction of your thesis? Why?
<u>Supervisors</u>
1. Is the practice of including hypothesis, research questions in a thesis abstract common in your discourse community?