

## **Internal structures of abstracts and introductions in selected academic papers concerning literary and cultural subjects**

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**Key words:** writing strategies, academic journal, abstract, introduction, arts and humanities

### **Introduction**

Writing academic papers to present the research worldwide is one of the key skills that modern scholars have to acquire. Not only the growing demands on the quality of the research but also its presentation occurs more and more in the centre of attention of the academic world. Especially for young researchers, it is challenging to publish their works in the journals belonging to Web of Science or Current Contents for many authors struggle to meet the requirements for publishing their papers. This paper is focused on the analysis of the possible differences related to the writing structures and strategies used in abstracts and introductions for these are usually the first parts of the research papers the academic and non-academic audience is acquainted with. Many of the full articles of respected journals are not always available without being charged, therefore, the structure and content of the research presented both in abstracts and introductions are decisive whether the particular research will or will not be beneficial for one's research or interest, and worthy of being purchased.

Both abstracts and introductions represent the key parts of the research papers as they are supposed to present similarly essential pieces of information about the research. So there is no wonder they have become analysed by many scholars from various perspectives (Murray, 2006; Alonso, 2009; Corbett, 2007; and others). This paper, therefore, focuses on the structural analysis of the selected papers' abstracts and introductions of the internationally recognized journal to find out whether they have the required type of the structure. Both abstracts and introductions represent the key parts of the research papers as they are supposed to present similarly essential pieces of information about the research.

Presenting the research and its results in the journals belonging to Web of Science or Current Contents databases represents for many scholars one of the highlights of their academic careers. The academic papers published within those databases are the results of the long-term expertise acquired in the academy. Therefore, several young researchers feel discouraged to present their research, in particular, due to the lack of their academic experience. Another discouraging reason is that there is only a limited number of the papers being published within the individual issues, which leads not only to high competitiveness among researchers but also to a stricter selection system on the side of the editorial boards of the individual journals. Many of those journals are published by the institutions which hold the prime in the area of academic research, still, they are open to international contribution as academy represents an open space. However, they present more culturally specific "form of the subject matter of inquiry" and as such, they have an influence on the "intellectual style" (p. 819) presented in research papers, according to Galtung (1981).

As a matter of fact, the differences among the intellectual styles present in culturally distinctive communities all around the world do not have to mean that the research is of a different quality, but it can affect its presentation and further dissemination among other members of the academic community. Regarding that, to avoid such a situation, many of the

respected journals emphasize using certain types of writing strategies and structures such as AIMRaD, AIM(RaD)C, and others. Most of these strategies and structures are primarily used in the papers the research of which is empirical. A question arises whether it is possible to apply similar writing strategies and structures to the types of papers related to the topics presenting literature, culture, history or arts, or whether there are other structures and strategies preferred in the certain types of academic journals.

## **Research Methodology**

The research corpus of this study comprises papers from an international journal, *World Literature Studies*. The journal belongs to several index databases including Current Contents, and it is published in four volumes per year by the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, Slovakia. As such, it presents articles written in English, Slovak, Czech, German, and French. According to Blaxter's (1998) definition of types of journals, this journal can be defined as "academic" (p. 150), for it introduces research done by the academics from the fields specifically related to arts and culture, but mostly literature and literary theory. Even though that may seem like a vast area, after taking a closer look, the audience is not that large, as each of the four issues is focused on a particular theme which is quite specifically defined at the very beginning. On the other hand, the journal does not present papers which focus only on theory, for individual papers involve also literary and cultural interpretations based on the researchers' professional orientation. Each of the issues has its editorial board which in cooperation with the experts from the Slovak Academy of Sciences is responsible for choosing individual papers for the issue.

In highly recognized international academic journals, like *World Literature Studies* since it has been moved from the index category Q4 to Q1, certain structures and writing strategies are preferred and have to be followed by authors to get, at least, through the first round of the long process of selection in which both abstract and the completed papers are evaluated. Still, one of the problems is that acceptance of the abstract does not have to mean that the final version of the papers will be published, which is claimed also on the *World Literature Studies*' webpage. Even though the selection process in this journal starts with the abstracts and continues with the full texts, the present paper is focused also on the relationship between the abstracts and introductions used in the final versions of the selected English-written papers. The selection of the papers is relevant since English as such has become a lingua franca relevant for academy and dissemination of the research worldwide, as some of the articles present also non-Anglophone topics.

To analyse the structures related to the abstracts and introductions used in the *World Literature Studies*, there were selected 5 articles from one particular issue 3 Vol. 10, published in 2018 which was according to its index already categorized in Q1. The choice of the papers is restricted only to one issue, for there is an assumption that "structure is signalled in each paper" (p. 45) of the issue, according to Murray (2005). Regarding that, the comparison of the abstract and introduction structures is based on the theoretical framework designed according to the theories related to the academic writing presented by Murray (2005) and Mullen – Johnson (2007) in the case of the abstracts, and Swales (1990) and Bassnett (2005) in the case of the introductions.

## **1 Abstracts and their structure**

### **1.1 IMRaD and AIMRaD**

Many academic papers disseminating the results of the natural or health sciences are based on empirical research, thus their structure has evolved into a systematic presentation of such results. Several scholars have focused on academic writing and its individual sections to guide and improve the techniques and conventions based on the growing demands on the

academy and information dissemination about the researches. Most of the respected database academic journals from the area of natural and health sciences, and some scientific fields related to humanities, therefore, adopted patterns for the papers which have become standards during the 20th century as it is presented in “The introduction, methods, results, and discussion (IMRAD) structure: a fifty-year survey” written by Sollaci and Pereira (2004). IMRAD and AIMRAD have become widely accepted structures for academic papers not only for the above-mentioned areas but also for fields of study related to linguistics and language. Also, more and more academics specialised in literature and culture incline to this structure due to the reasons mentioned above. Though, it is often questionable whether such a structure is suitable also for articles from the fields of literature and culture and their cross-fields.

One of the reasons why AIMRAD, IMRAD have become popular, is their clearly stated structure. In most of the journals, abstracts are situated at the beginning of the papers, as they provide brief information about the research background, the purpose of the papers, the methods used for the research and writing the paper, the information about the results of the research as well as the conclusions (Sollaci and Pereira 2004). As the acronym suggests, in case of IMRAD, the abstract is not part of the papers, though, it can be published as a part of the journal or completely separately, for example, as it happens in the case of the papers published as conference proceedings, where abstracts are published as individual proceedings.

Abstracts in comparison to the complete academic papers are restricted by their length, as each academic journal has its limited number of characters that can be used. Therefore, they cannot provide the full context of the research presented in the papers in detail. Regarding that the authors have to focus only on the key aspects, for even academic papers should be written in a way “the so-called ‘general reader’ can understand” (Murray, 2005, p. 110). These “essential elements of the paper” are “topic, purpose and scope, methods and data analysis, the insights or findings yielded, and the primary significance or implications” (Mullen – Johnson, 2007, p. 167) and to some extent cover the answers on “Brown’s 8 questions” (in Murray, 2005, p. 111), which have become a useful tool for many researchers during their academic career. While the background of the research often illustrates the topic of the research and its scope, the purpose of the research explains in the abstract the reason why such or even further research is necessary. The introduction of methods explains not only how but also when and what procedures and conditions have to be set during the research. The abstract does not provide the readers with the complete results of the research, though, it often suggests their role for both theory and practice. One of the most relevant pieces of information that the abstract provides is presented in its conclusion, and it is the “key benefit for the readers” (Brown in Murray, 2005, p. 111). The data obtained on abstract structuring are presented in the table below (Table 1). They are discussed in the following section.

Paper	Number of characters in Abstract	Background	Purpose	Introduction of methods	Results	Conclusions	Empirical research
Paper 1	754	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Paper 2	1522	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Paper 3	1100	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Paper 4	642	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Paper 5	626	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

**Table 1** Structure of the abstracts of the selected papers

## 1.2 Results of the analysis of the abstracts in the selected papers

Each of the analysed articles from the issue of the *World Literature Studies* journal included the abstract, however, it was situated not at the beginning but the end of the individual papers together with the contact information about the authors. Regarding that, the structure of the papers does not incline to IMRaD but rather AIMRaD structure of the journals, yet its adjusted version. Concerning the general features of an abstract mentioned above, the editorial board of WLS requires approximately 600 characters. In the case of the analysed papers, the length of the individual abstracts was between 626 and 1522 characters (Table 1). In relation to their structure, three of the papers (Paper 2, 3, 4) included in their abstracts information about the research's background, purpose, methods, results and briefly mentioned conclusions (Table 1). Despite that some of them were not organized in the same order, the information was presented still quite clearly there. In the case of Paper 2, the abstract also involved brief information about the presence of empirical research as a support to the results of the paper. While Paper 1 illustrated a brief presentation of the research background, there was no direct information about the purpose of the research or its brief conclusion. The paper did not include any information about the presence of empirical research as well. As mentioned above, Papers 3 and 4 included all the information except the empirical research. The most surprising were the results of the analysis of Paper 5. The abstract of this paper included only the introduction of the background of the research, everything else was absent.

Regarding that, it is possible to say that two-thirds of the analysed papers follow the required structure of abstracts presented in the AIMRaD structure required by most of the highly recognized journals. In addition to that, one of them includes the information about the empirical research, even though as such it represents the combination of quantitative and qualitative research, regardless, that is in accordance with what Sollaci and Perreira (2004) presented. In the abstract of Paper 1, the purpose and conclusion are absent, though, the rest of the abstract provides enough information to make it informative enough for further reading of the paper. On the other hand, Paper 5 does not contain enough information required for the abstracts, so those who might be interested in the topic of the research will face the hesitation whether to continue in reading or not. However, one of the pluses is the uniqueness of the research topic this paper offers.

## 2 Structure of Introductions

### 2.1 Introduction and its functions

Similarly, as in the case of abstracts, also introductions are key parts of the papers when it comes to the review process. Corbett (2007) refers to them as “shop window” (p. 24) of the papers that is relevant for those who take part in the editorial process of the papers' selection and those who intend to read those papers as they might be beneficial for their own research. The conventions of the introduction writing in the academic papers have been analysed for some time, though, as mentioned, mostly concerning the areas related to the natural or social sciences (Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2000; Swales, 1990, 2004; Gopen – Swam, 1990; Kirkman, 1992; Turk – Kirkman, 1989). In contrast to the structures of the papers in the previously mentioned areas, the humanities and arts have been less restricted as the content of their research could not be grasped within the firmly determined rules and conditions of the former. Corbett (2007) emphasizes their “greater variation in the structure and style” (p. 25), which is simply accepted by academia. However, the originally less conventional journals from those areas, to achieve wider academic recognition, had to re-evaluate their attitudes to the structures of the papers as well. Alonso (2009) emphasizes that the introduction, and not only within the AIMRaD structure, should pave the way to the “current knowledge and indicate the gap [that] exists in the field of study” (p. 120). To become beneficial for the academic

audience, the papers should become the means of how to not only cover but also to enrich the academic environment with something new or different.

An introduction, therefore, illustrates significant features of the research that the author develops in the body of the papers later. The position of the research questions, hypothesis, aims or purposes of the study is usually at the end of the introduction of the journal papers (Alonso, 2011). Swales (1990) puts emphasis on defining the “territory” for establishing of the particular research. Only after that, it is possible to identify the areas within the territory which require a closer analysis, question them so that new views or observations emerge (in Corbett, 2007, p. 25). In comparison to that, Bassnett (2005), whose research combines some steps introduced by Swales (1990), presents a similar structure of the introduction. Though, in her case, the focus is concentrated more on the specified area of the research, identifying the matter to be explored more, and presenting the means and procedures of how to achieve that. Regarding that, one may complain as a considerable amount of research is designed to “express the problem-solving methodology” (Corbett, 2006, p. 28). As Corbett (2006) continues, that is often problematic for the researchers related to the arts and humanities who have to employ different methodologies which “allow greater latitude for evocative images and perspective-jolting metaphors as valid avenues towards enlightenment” (p. 30). Therefore, the following part of the paper is focused on the analysis of the structure of the introductions in the selected *WLS* papers which are primarily presenting research from the area of arts and humanities.

## **2.2 Results of the analysis of the introductions in the selected papers**

In relation to each of the analysed introductions, the main focus was on three areas analysed by both Bassnett (2005) and Swales (1990). It included the establishment of territory and research identification, an identification of the specific area and specific issue and their specification of the means of how to approach the issue. Corbett (2006) emphasizes that in the case of the first area there are other points which should be included in it, such as “(a) asserting that your research topic is important, (b) making some kind of generalization about the research topic, and/or (c) reviewing the previously-published literature on the topic” (p. 26). In the case of the second area, the author deals with the options, such as (a) arguing that previous research is wrong, (b) indicating a gap in previous research, (c) raising a question about previous research without arguing that it is completely wrong, and/or (d) continuing a tradition that previous research has started” (Ibid, p. 27). In the case of the third area, Corbett (2006) alludes to Swales (1990) (2004) in a way that the introductions should finish with “(a) outlining the purpose of one’s research, (b) announcing its existence, (c) announcing the findings of the present research, and/or (d) previewing the structure of the research article” (p. 28). The results of the analyses of the individual introductions based on the descriptions of the individual areas are noted in Table 2. The table presents not only the information that the individual introductions contained particular areas but also their closer specifications which were recognized in the papers.

In general, each of the analysed papers contained the individual areas, including the specification related to the aim, hypothesis or research questions situated at the ends of the introductions. Though, the individual papers differed in the specificity of the way they presented in their introductions in relation to the research. As an interesting observation can be the structures of Paper 1 and 5, which similarly as their abstracts, had simpler structures, which will be presented closely in the paragraphs below. In the case of Paper 2, 3 and 4, the structure of their introductions was presented more specifically. About that, the link between the structure of the abstracts and introductions is obvious as they share some structural features.

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4	Paper 5
1. Establishment of territory and research identification	YES (b)	YES (c)	YES (b) (c)	YES (b) (c)	YES (a) (b) (c)
2. Identification of the specific area and specific issue	YES (d)	YES (b) (c)	YES (b) (c)	YES (b) (c)	YES (d)
3. Specification of the means how to approach the issue	YES (a)	YES (a) (b) (c)	YES (a) (b) (c)	YES (c) (d)	YES (c) (d)
Research Question, Hypothesis, or Aims	YES aims	YES a hypothesis	YES a hypothesis	YES a hypothesis	YES aims

**Table 2** Structure of the introductions of the selected papers

The structure of Paper 1 introduction was the simplest one out of the analysed papers. The introductory part provided the reader with the information related to the topic of the paper in a more generalised manner. The author of the paper kept focused on the selected area of the research, which was obvious in the fact that the paper was built on the generalized information related to the topic, and the author continued similarly. The third part of the introduction of Paper 1 delineated and reasoned the outline of the research and was without any diversions or pointless descriptions. As such, it resulted in presenting the aims of the research which were also delineated quite clearly.

The introduction of Paper 2 was the longest and was divided into two parts. In this introduction, Paper 2 reviewed the papers and research from other authors, though related to the author's research. In contrast to Paper 1, there was no generalisation. Instead, the author emphasized various views related to the research topic and created a base for the other part of the introduction which was pinpointing what was missing in those research studies. In addition to that, the second part of the introduction did not criticise the previous research but rather suggested the possible complements to the previous perspectives. The third part of the introduction in Paper 2 briefly formulated the purpose of the present research as well as it referred to some of its results. The elaboration of Paper 2 introduction can be seen in the involvement of the hypothesis instead of simply stating the aims or presenting the research questions.

Paper 3 introduction was shorter though it was elaborated quite specifically. The author identified not only the area of the research but also presented the relevance of such research. Similarly as in Paper 1 introduction, even in Paper 3, the introduction contained some level of generalisation of the topic, though not in such extent as it was in Paper 1. In addition to that, it also included the author's critical views on other topic-related research which similarly as in Paper 2, established space for further ideas related to the author's research. The introduction contained the layout referring to the presented research including its purpose and some of the findings, and a hypothesis confronting the author's own research and the previous research.

The introduction of Paper 4 also covers three of the above mentioned areas. In comparison to the rest of the introductions, this one is the second most extensive introduction regarding its length. However, its structure was not that balanced as in Paper 2 or the other

shorter introductions. Still, the introduction contained the information about the research area and to some extent, it offered some generalisation of the topic, at the same time it pays a lot of attention to the investigation of the literature and research dealing with the author's research topic. In addition to that, this part of the introduction referred to pros and cons of the previous research and theories and sorted out the specific areas which were in contrast with the topic of the author's research. The end of the introduction suggested some of the results as well as the outline of the body of the papers. Even in this case, the introduction contained a hypothesis situated at the end of the first paragraph of the introduction.

The last analyzed introduction presented in Paper 5 was longer than the introductions in Papers 1 and 3, and shorter than those in Papers 2 and 4. Similarly, as in Paper 3, the introduction included the points emphasizing the relevancy of the research presented in the paper as well as the key information from the studies related to the author's research in the form of review. In case of the identification and addressing the issue, the second part of the introduction focused on the development of the knowledge presented in the reviewed researches. At the end of the introduction, the author alluded to some of the results and outlined key points of the research later developed in the paper. While the previous papers involved hypotheses, Paper 5 included quite clearly stated aims of the research and again emphasized the research relevance.

## Discussion

In the case of respected academic papers focused on humanities and arts, there is a growing tendency to follow the IMRaD or AIMRaD structures. However, as the results of the analysis showed on the selected research papers of *World Literature Studies*, the area of arts and humanities still employs a variety of approaches to present the research what directly influences the structures of the papers, the abstracts and introductions in particular. Based on the analysis, it is possible to say that despite the journal's short time of being in the index category Q1, the authors of the academic papers dealing with historical, cultural and artistic topics have started to employ the structures which are seen as more common practice for the other respected journals with higher indexes.

As it can be seen in the case of Papers 2, 3, and 4, the structure of their abstracts and introductions was very similar for each of them presented the background of the research, specification of the research itself, the methodology with the hypotheses, the results or conclusions. In particular, Papers 2 and 3 quite precisely developed the information related to the background specification of the research area including the processes and means how to approach any of the issues. Regarding that, it is possible to say that the introductions in the above-mentioned Papers, not only followed but also developed the information presented in the abstracts in more detail.

On the other hand, the results of the analyses revealed that some of the papers' structures, notably those in the abstracts, did not involve certain structural elements. Paper 1 missed in its abstract the presentation of the purpose and some preliminary conclusions of the research, therefore, it diverted from the established structures characteristic for most of the academic journals based on the AIMRaD structures. Yet, the introduction with the information implemented within its structure complemented and developed the lacking parts.

Paper 5's abstract can be seen as the structure which is simplified the most in comparison to the others. As such it lacked the information about the purpose of the research, used methodology, or any note about the results and conclusions referring to the research. The introduction of this paper, on the other hand, contained the presentation of the background and the area of the research, though, it also included the specification of the aims of the research which illustrated also the purpose of the research, and the means how to achieve them. Moreover, the introduction of Paper 5 complemented the missing information about the

research results and its conclusions. Similarly, as in the case of Paper 1, even Paper 5 represents another structural variety affected by the methodological approach used in the research and diverts from the established structures. However, the elaboration of the introduction substitutes the lacking information from the abstract.

One of the explanations resides in the distinctive approaches which the specific topics of those papers required. As a result, the structures of the abstracts were affected by that. Then again, just for the diversity in the abstracts, it was possible to recognize the importance of the relationship between the abstracts and the introductions. To some extent, the individual introductions substituted the missing structures in the abstracts as they complemented the lacking information.

## **Conclusion**

The organization of the structure in case of abstracts and introductions affects the attitudes of those who evaluate scholarly papers as well as the audience in that whether the paper is interesting or relevant and enriching for one's research. Especially, in the case of highly recognized scholarly papers, these two parts have a key role in the initial review process.

The present paper was focused on the analysis of the structure of abstracts and introductions in the selected papers in the academic journal included in the international databases of Current Contents, *World Literature Studies*. The abstracts were analysed concerning the presentation of brief information about the research background, the purpose of the papers, the methods used for the research and writing the paper, the information about the results of the research as well as the conclusions.

According to the analysis, three papers included in their abstracts the key information about the research. Moreover, only one of those abstracts (Paper 2) contained also a reference about the empirical research as a part of the papers, therefore, it followed the structure of the abstract characteristic for the AIMRaD structures of the academic texts. The remaining two abstracts (Paper 1 and 5) lacked parts such as presentation of the research purpose, the introduction of methods, results or conclusions, therefore, the information about the presented research was not complete.

In the case of the analysis of the introductions, the results revealed that also the structures of the introductions of the selected papers did not have unified structures. The analysis was focused on three main areas and the possible features they could involve. While the first area was focused on the identification of the area based on the establishment of its niche and territory together with the specification of the research, the second one emphasized the specification of this niche concerning the research problem. The third area referred to as the means of how to approach the specific issues related to the niche and research problem.

According to the analyses of the individual introductions, it was revealed that each of them contained all three above mentioned areas. However, their differences resided in the specifications of these areas. Papers 2, 3, 4 covered at least two or three of those specifications. Paper 1 covered only one specification per area. Paper 5 was somewhere in between as it had three identified specifications in the first area, only one in the second area and two specifications in the third area.

Based on the analyses, it is possible to present that the introductions which had more specification per area, illustrated the research more precisely than those whose areas were limited only to one specification. Regarding that, the introduction structures seemed better organized and compendious in relation to the presentation of information about the research.

What was also interesting was the observation of the relationship between the structures of the abstracts and introductions. The abstracts of Papers 2, 3, and 4 included in their structures all the features required. Concerning the structure of their introductions, again,

Papers 2, 3 and 4 represented elaborated parts of the papers. The remaining two papers differed from the others in relation to the structure of their abstracts and introductions. Though the introductions complemented the lacking information and caused that the quality of the rest of the papers was secured. On the contrary, it just supports the fact that the area of humanities and arts concerning the writing the academic papers even for the respected academic journals, still considers that some research studies require to be presented via specific style, structure and employed strategies. Though, to prove that this part of the analysis was not just an exception, the analysis of more papers would be required. To contribute to the existing research on the academic writing, the analysis of other papers from the selected issues of the years 2016, 2017 and 2019, is planned not only to analyse the structure and relationship between the abstracts and introductions but also to observe the possible changes in the writing style and structure affected by the change of the index category.

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### **Summary**

#### **Internal structures of abstracts and introductions in selected academic papers concerning literary and cultural subjects**

The present paper is focused on the analysis of the possible differences related to the writing structures and strategies used in the abstracts and introductions of the academic journal *World Literature Studies*

in the selected issue from 2018 and its papers published in English. The aim of the study was to determine whether the abstracts and introductions of the papers related to area of art and humanities followed and shared the features related to their structure which are accepted and preferred by the academic journals of higher ranks. The results of the analysis refer to growing tendency to employ such types of structures even in the research areas related to literature, culture or arts. On the other hand, the analysis revealed that in the indexed journal, *World Literature Studies*, the structure of the abstracts is not always unified, as some structures are omitted. Regarding that, the missing information is present and sometimes developed in the introductions. This is an important result of the research presented in this paper, as it illustrates the importance of the mutual relationship between academic abstracts and introductions when presenting the academic research.

*This paper has been published as a part of submitted KEGA n.007PU-4/2019: Defining a writing style of scholarly papers written in English vs. Slovak/Slavic linguoculture conventions.*