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Writing *Suggestions for Further Research* in Iranian Applied Linguistics Theses: A Generic and Metadiscoursal Investigation

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Abstract

Academic writing has tended to focus on research articles far more than on post-graduate theses (Bunton, 2005; Swales, 1990). Of the studies based on theses, relatively little research has focused on the generic structure of *Suggestions for further research*. To supplement the sparse knowledge in this area, the current study investigated the schematic structure (i.e., moves and steps) of *Suggestions for further research* and explored the metadiscoursal features commonly used in this section of theses. The corpus included 80 PhD dissertations and 80 MA theses from Iranian universities in applied linguistics. The moves and the corresponding steps were identified and, for a detailed analysis, Hyland's (2005) classification of metadiscourse was used. Findings revealed four moves in this part genre, named,

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Justification of the present study, Suggestions for repetition of the current study, Implications of the study, and *The researcher's hopes*. The MA and PhD theses showed differences in the use of them. The results can broaden the understanding of the nature and function of this part genre and the way the metadiscoursal features are realized; accordingly, the study can have important implications for students' thesis writing.

Keywords: Academic writing; Schematic structure; Metadiscoursal features; Suggestions for further research; Thesis; Genre

Introduction

The significance of genre knowledge in helping language learners understand and acquire academic writing has been widely acknowledged for over two decades. Academic writing can be a major stumbling block for students as well as native speakers studying at English colleges and universities. It is the manifestation of a learning journey and a non-stop process of reflection, improvement, development, and fulfillment of various actions (Murray & Moore, 2006, p. 5). The majority of MA and PhD students are required to compile the best of their knowledge on how to write a thesis in English which may not be their first language (In this study, we use the word thesis to refer to both MA and PhD theses). As Bailey (2006) claims, it is important to make sure that students' writing skills meet the necessary standards. These students often find meeting the demands of this genre sophisticated and cumbersome, especially nonnative speakers of English whose conventions and expectations of academic writing may be different (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Therefore, as one of the most difficult scholarly activities during one's academic experience, writing a thesis is part of high-stakes learning through which a researcher is assumed to identify and carefully examine problems, analyze the findings, demonstrate research-related knowledge, argue the results and relate them to important concepts (Dong, 1998; Mauch & Park, 2003). In fact, thesis writing is more a case of students establishing a niche in an area of study (Hyland, 1999). They should be taught how to organize their theses and how organization is influenced by the problem in focus or the type of study (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). A considerable amount of discourse analysis research, following the Swalesean (1990) tradition and Bhatia (1993), has focused on the schematic structure and rhetorical patterning (i.e., moves and steps) which have been proved to be valuable in developing pedagogic models of writing (see e.g. Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Swales & Feak, 1994, 2000). Following the latter studies, we

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define moves in terms of communicative functions, and steps or strategies as linguistic realizations of the moves.

Researchers have explored the organization of different thesis types. The *traditional* thesis consists of the typical IMRD format (introduction, method, result, and discussion); however, Thompson (1999) divides this category into *simple* and *complex,* depending on the amount of work involved. Based on a compilation of publishable articles, two other thesis types are topic-based (Dudley-Evans, 1999) and dissertation based (Dong, 1998). In Iranian universities, theses are usually traditional in structure. Even a PhD thesis which may include more chapters, depending on how the study was carried out, is most likely to follow the IMRD organization or a variation of it.

On the versatile nature of thesis writing, Thompson (1999) interviewed PhD supervisors about the organization, presentation, citation and argumentation employed in PhD dissertations in different disciplines. He examined, in particular, dissertations written on agricultural botany and agricultural economics and found a wide range of differences between them, even in the length of the texts. He also found quite different views on how students positioned themselves in relation to their texts. Thompson's work suggests that there is no single hard and fast way in which theses and dissertations should be written in a university. Writing a thesis will be influenced by the values and norms accepted in the discipline in focus and by the research perspective the student adopts, as well as by the advice that is given to the novice researcher by his/her supervisor.

Hyland (2004a) also examined the purposes and distributions of metadiscourse in a corpus of 240 doctoral and master's theses amounting to four million words written by Hong Kong students. The analysis suggested how academic writers, using language, represented themselves and their work in different fields, and thus how metadiscourse could be seen as a means of distinguishing disciplinary communities. He found that the PhD students used much more metadiscourse than did the master's students, which could be justified by the more sophisticated nature of PhD students' writing and by the length of PhD theses which entails more organization.. Such qualitative analyses can mark disciplinary differences as well as differences between MA and PhD level writers.

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A few other studies have established generic configurations for describing the organization of acknowledgements in theses (Hyland, 2004b) and the Discussion or Conclusion sections in research articles and Master's or PhD theses (e.g., Bunton, 2005; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Jalilifar, Hayati, & Namdari, 2012; Swales & Feak, 1994). Generally, they have considered *Suggestions for further research* as a single move in Discussion or Conclusion, and they have eschewed providing an in-depth schematization of the sub-components of this section. The paucity of research in this area is shown even more when we recognize that, in addition to its generic configuration, our knowledge of interpersonal metadiscourse that characterizes this section has yet to be examined.

More recently, research has investigated the potential relationship between moves and steps and their typical lexico-grammatical realizations (Flowerdew, 1998, 2008; Upton & Connor, 2001). Flowerdew and Forest (2009) showed a close affinity between lexical choice and generic structure in a corpus-based analysis of Literature Reviews by PhD students. Their study revealed the complex interactions occurring between the keyword *research* and its complex range of uses which demonstrated the significance of keyword analysis in investigating the relation between macro structures and their micro structure (linguistic) realizations in the Literature Reviews by PhD students. Following this new trend, the current study analyzed the last move of the discussion section in PhD and MA theses, *Suggestions for further research*, to identify its steps or strategies and to find its typical metadiscoursal items based on Hyland's (2005) classification of metadiscourse which involves 494 items.

While making no *Suggestions for further research* may suggest that the work is complete, this move can be adopted as a separate heading even when the writer has admitted no possible flaws in the thesis. It indicates that the present scholarly work can be expanded or even improved upon, laying the groundwork for future studies. Studies of the generic structure of this section in theses seem too rare in spite of many move-based studies on specific sections of research articles or even theses. Reviewing the extensive literature on theses transpires that there is little empirical evidence to suggest the generic and metadiscoursal features of *Suggestions for further research* that attracts the attention of most students and researchers who seek for a ready-made future research topic in their area of specialty. Therefore, the present study intends to examine the overall structure of the *Suggestions for further research* section of theses in the field of applied linguistics to identify its

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metadiscoursal features and macro structures. Based on the above argument, two research questions are formulated to form the focus of this study:

1. What rhetorical structures characterize the *Suggestions for further research* section of theses in applied linguistics?
2. What metadiscoursal features specify this section of theses in applied linguistics?

While the two questions seem to require quantitative data, we also seek more detailed qualitative analyses through incorporating genuine examples from our corpus into the study to demonstrate how this section is deployed by novice researchers using specific moves, steps and metadiscoursal devices.

Methodology

The Corpus

The corpora used in this study were extracted from MA and PhD theses presented since the year 2000 in the subdisciplines of applied linguistics which are of particular interest for pedagogic reasons, and raising one's awareness of genre features becomes directly relevant as part of its disciplinary goals (Ruiying & Allison, 2003). Eighty MA theses and eighty PhD theses were selected, and the section on *Suggestions for further research,* as a separate part of their discussion or conclusion chapter, was considered for the analysis. The decision was made to control variations in the organizational structure, and so we selected those theses that included *Suggestions for further research* under a separate heading in their discussions. The data were selected from State and Islamic Azad universities of Ahvaz, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Tehran from Linguistics and English Language Teaching departments (see Table 1). The rationale for the selection of these theses was their accessibility because theses are often difficult to obtain from university libraries and are even harder to obtain from outside universities. Moreover, only a few Iranian universities offer PhD programs, which makes the availability of these texts even more difficult, hence leading to the uneven distribution of the theses across the universities.

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Table 1
The List of Universities and Obtained Theses

Universities	MA Theses	PhD Theses
Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz	6	0
Islamic Azad University, Khouzestan Science and Research Branch	18	0
Shiraz University	0	10
Isfahan University	10	37
Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan Branch	15	11
Tehran Shahid Beheshti University	12	0
Tehran Tarbiyat Modares University	15	3
Tehran Alame Tabatabai University	0	2
Islamic Azad University, Tehran Science and Research Branch	4	17
Total	80	80

The Coding Framework

To develop the coding framework used in the analysis of *Suggestions for further research*, we adopted triangulation in the hope of reaching a better understanding of this section's rhetorical structure. We compiled a list of moves based on the existing literature. These moves are bound to be inferential and highly subjective, and this can cause coding problems. To minimize the magnitude of the problem, each move was further subdivided into its constituent steps or the linguistic markers that identify a move. To identify the moves, the analysts carefully read the text, identified the function of each section of the text, and then made a judgment on its appropriate move. We conducted a pilot investigation into the schematic configurations of 30 samples by three researchers (the present researchers and another researcher who was familiar with the generic analysis of academic writing) independently and the results were compared to agree on a model for the analysis of *Suggestions for further research*. The criterion for the identification of the generic features was reaching a full agreement on each component; when the analysis of a part was a bone of contention among us, differences were resolved before final decisions. Therefore, the outcome was a model with four moves comprising 15 different steps (see Table 2). In the next stage, the framework was validated by requesting two local journal editors for their comments. The editors'

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perspectives were juxtaposed with ours so that conclusions could be drawn for revising the model.

Table 2
The Rhetorical Structure of the Suggestions for Further Research Section

Moves	Steps
1 Reviewing the study	1) Reviewing the objectives of the study
	2) Presenting the review of literature
	3) Reviewing the methodology
2 Significance of the Study	1) Emphasizing the newness of the present study
	2) Justification of the present study
	3) Justification for further research
3 Limitations of the Study	1) Presenting the limitations of the previous studies
	2) Reference to the gap(s) in the present study
	3) Non-generalizability of the study
4 Recommendations	1) Point of departure
	2) Recommendations for extending the current study
	3) Suggestions for repetition of the current study
	4) Implications of the study
	5) Further research questions
	6) The researcher's hopes

Finally, a detailed analysis was conducted to identify and map the metadiscoursal features most frequently employed to specify the steps in this study, and to do this, Hyland's (2005) classification of metadiscourse was exploited. The model regards all metadiscourse markers as interactive or interactional. The interactive dimension is related to the writer's awareness of a reader's tacit knowledge, interests, rhetorical expectations and processing needs while the interactional dimension "concerns the ways writers conduct interaction by intruding and commenting on their message" (Hyland, 2005, p. 49). This scheme sees metadiscourse as "self-reflective linguistic material, aiming to guide the reader's perception of a text while focusing attention on the ways writers project

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themselves in their discourse to convey their stance towards both the content and the audience of the text" (Del Saz-Rubio, 2011, p. 261).

Procedure

The procedure adopted in this study began with the selection of the section on *Suggestions for further research* of applied linguistics theses which were presented and defended in the Iranian universities that offer post graduate degrees. Thus, 160 samples of this section, 80 MA and 80 PhD, were selected. Then, for the purpose of identification and easier access, the texts from each group were separately codified (Mt1 to Mt80 for MA theses, Pd1 to Pd80 for PhD theses). In order to minimize the influence of time (as generic structures of texts are subject to change over time) and to make the study more reliable, only theses defended since the year 2000 were included in the study. Next, the texts were analyzed to identify the type and frequency of the steps as well as the order of the presentation of the steps. Sometimes, a particular step was repeated in two or more distinctive paragraphs. If so, they were counted as one step. That is, the steps were considered as being either present or absent. Those steps which occurred in 60% to 100% of the corpora were regarded as obligatory steps, those between 30% and 59% of the corpora as optional, and those occurring in less than 30% of the corpora were considered arbitrary. The steps in each text were calculated for each group of theses to detect the possible differences or similarities among them and to see where the differences were noteworthy. Then, *chi*-square analyses were used to compare the obtained frequencies to examine whether the possible variations were statistically meaningful.

In the next phase of the study, the metadiscoursal features in each step, used by the thesis writers, were identified by adopting Hyland's (2005) model. After highlighting tokens in the texts, they were analyzed and counted manually in order to see how metadiscourse items in each step were distributed. Finally, we double-checked them in the printed pages of each text and calculated the frequencies of each feature across the two corpora.

However, as stated earlier, this kind of analysis involves a certain degree of subjectivity. In order to minimize the risk of subjectivity and insure intra-rater reliability of the analysis (besides inter-rater reliability), all the corpora were reanalyzed and rechecked for the second time by one of the researchers of this

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study after a four week interval and the resulting intra-rater reliability index was 0.93.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Move 1

The first move, *Reviewing the study*, comprises three steps which circle around the different parts of theses. The three steps are (1) *Reviewing the objectives of the study* (10% in the MA and 20% in the PhD theses), (2) *Presenting the review of literature* (15% occurrence in the MA and 25% in the PhD theses), and (3) *Reviewing the methodology* (72.5% in the MA and 96.2% in the PhD theses). Table 3 presents the distribution of the moves and the corresponding steps in the texts.

Table 3
Results for the Steps in Suggestions for Further Research

Moves	Steps	MA	%	PhD	%	x^2	P-value
1 Reviewing the study	1 Reviewing the objectives of the study	8	10	16	20	2.667	0.102
	2 Presenting the review of literature	12	15	20	25	2	0.157
	3 Reviewing the methodology	58	72.5	77	96.2	2.674	0. 102
2 Significance of the study	1 Emphasizing the newness of the present study	4	5	8	10	1.333	0.248
	2 Justification of the present study	12	15	36	45	12	0.001*
	3 Justification for further research	58	72.5	68	85	0.794	0.373
3 Limitations of the study	1 Presenting the limitations of the previous studies	6	7.5	8	10	0.286	0.593
	2 Reference to the gap(s) in the present study	22	27.5	36	45	3.379	0.066
	3 Non-	12	15	16	20	0.571	0.45

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	generalizability of the study						
4 Recommendations	1 Point of departure	32	40	40	50	0.889	0.346
	2 Recommendations for extending the current study	80	100	76	95	0.228	0.633
	3 Suggestions for repetition of the current study	12	15	24	30	4	0.046*
	4 Implications of the study	4	5	16	20	7.2	0.007*
	5 Further research questions	12	15	16	20	0.571	0.45
	6 The researcher's hopes	6	7.5	16	20	4.545	0.033*

P < 0.05 Critical value= 3.84* Significant differences
Note. Obligatory index= 60%-100% Optional step= 30%-60% Arbitrary step=1%-30%

The *Reviewing the study* move can be compared to Ruiying and Allison's (2003) two moves– the *Background Information* move which prepares readers for the forthcoming discussion of results by restating the aims and purposes of the study, theoretical background and/or research methodology and also the *Summarizing the study* move which is used to provide a brief account of the main points from the perspective of the overall study. This move is also similar to the *Information move* in the model by Jalilifar, et al (2012) and the *Background Information* move in Hopkins and Dudley-Evans's framework. However, the presence of this move in *Suggestions for further research* is not to discuss the results of the study but to broaden the horizons of study in future research.

The results revealed that *Reviewing the objectives of the study,* as the first step of move one, was neither optional nor obligatory but an arbitrary step. Though not reflected in the questions formulated for the study, we further compared this move in the PhD and MA theses as this was implied in the way we reported the results in Table 3. The comparison formed the basis for collecting more information about the shared and non-shared generic tendencies of the two groups so that

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generalizations could be made about the rhetorical organization of *Suggestion for Further Research*. Although the PhD students used this step twice as much as the MA students, a *chi*-square analysis indicated no significant differences in the distribution of this step in move one of the two corpora, as shown in Table 3. Accordingly, students sometimes tend to retell the objectives of their study to inform the readers why their study was done and what was found, confirmed, or rejected. This may persuade the readers to refer to previous chapters to look for areas for further research. The tendency to move back to earlier parts of the text was higher among the PhD students who reflect more on their objectives in this part genre. *Aim, purpose,* and *objective* are frequently employed as lexical signals of this step. In the following example, the writer, by using the endophoric phrase *As mentioned earlier,* tried to retell the aims of the study and persuade the interested reader to refer to the previous chapters.

> *1. As mentioned earlier, the aim of the present study was three-fold: a) to develop an empirically-tested typology according to the go-togetherness of the variables explored, b) to get to know how student achievement varies as a function of teacher type, and c) how pedagogical knowledge base of the three clusters of teachers, found in the present study, differs. (Pd 2)*

The second step of move one, *Presenting the review of literature*, was not evenly distributed in the MA and PhD writings, but a *chi*-square analysis showed no significant differences in the distribution of this step (see Table 3). In this step, the author is not assumed to simply draw on earlier studies but to make suggestions about the topic in the light of earlier studies. The less frequent use of this step by the MA students indicates that they may not consider the significance of relating their findings to previous investigations; similarly, the PhD students, as more sophisticated writers who tend to explore untouched areas to be addressed in future by community members, did not make any considerable use of this step. *Presenting the review of literature* in *Suggestions for further research* compares the study with previous relevant research, shows how it is connected to the existing research and whether or not the new findings support or refute the previous research. Also, the most important role of this step is, as shown in the following example, referring to previous research and highlighting the shortcomings in the present literature which could be taken up in future studies.

> *2. According to…., previous research has suggested that demographic variables explained some of the variance in teacher autonomy but her results suggested that a large proportion of the variance still remained unclear.*

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Future studies can delve into these other areas which are still unclear in the field. (Mt 12)

The analysis showed that *Reviewing the methodology,* as the third step of move one, which has an overall look at the study, is obligatory in both groups of texts. However, the findings revealed that the MA and PhD students did not make an equal use of this step (see Table 3). The obvious lexical signals for this step are … *of this study* (see example 3) and *The present study …*. Participants, materials, instruments, and procedures are frequently mentioned before or after these signals in step 3 (see example 3), and they are followed by suggestions for changing, modifying, or repeating these parts which may result in new findings. Both groups of students preferred to reflect on the *recommendations for further research* segment by reviewing the results and parts of the previous chapters of their study. Besides, students wished that future studies could complete and find out the lost rings of their own studies, and that the aspects that were not included in their study for reasons such as the shortage of time, huge size of work, or even inaccessible participants, corpora, models, etc. could be taken into account in future studies. It should be pointed out that this step usually merged with the second step of move 4 (*Recommendations for extending the current study*). Take the following example in which the participants of the study are reviewed as only females, and the author suggests replicating the study with both male and female participants to see if gender affects the result of the study.

3. All of the participants of this study were females. Other studies can be done on both sexes in order to see the effect of gender. (Mt 1)

Analysis of Move 2

Significance of the study, as the second move of our framework which makes the researcher's work worthwhile, consists of three different steps: (1) *Emphasizing the newness of the present study* (5% occurrence in the MA theses and 10% in the PhD theses), (2) *Justification of the present study* (15% in the MA theses and 45% in the PhD theses), and (3) *Justification for further research* (72.5% occurrence in the MA theses and 85% in the PhD theses), as shown in Table 3.

Emphasizing the newness of the present study in our framework is rarely used in both MA and PhD corpora. The absence of this step may suggest the lack of originality and existence of sufficient past research; hence many of these postgraduate studies are taken to be replications. This calls for the experts' more

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direct involvement in selecting and defining genuine research works which will have a determining role in finding a niche for publishing papers derived from them. As the following example reveals, the writer tried to define his study as genuine by using the phrase *a starting point,* as well as describing his study as *ground-breaking,* the findings as *valuable,* and the whole inquiry as *relatively new.*

> *4. The present study could be cited as a starting point for identifying the various clusters of ELT teachers based on their performance on a number of teacher-related variables and also a ground-breaking study of the effects of teacher characteristics on student achievement in second language pedagogy and in learning environments where the confounding effects of curriculum, materials, and tests are eliminated. The findings provide valuable information in this regard. It also takes a further step in probing the pedagogical knowledge base of second language teachers, a relatively new area of inquiry in second language pedagogy. (Pd 1)*

The second step of move two, *Justification of the present study,* appeared as an optional step in the PhD corpora. As shown in Table 3, *chi*-square analyses indicated significant differences in the distribution of this step across the MA and PhD writings, implying that PhD students, as more experienced members of their community, have greater tendencies to justify their current work and to identify significant topics and problems than MA students. Justifying research in this section of the thesis may also persuade the readers to move in this line of research. This step is somewhat similar to step two in move one of the modified CARS model (Swales, 2004), *Presenting positive justification,* which is also an optional step. As shown in the following example, trying to justify a particular topic, the writer reminds the participants of the interesting nature of the stories.

> *5. The fact that most young learners adore stories cannot be rejected. As we all know, affective factors to learn a foreign language play an important role; being interested is one of the factors. During this study, the students were seen to read stories enthusiastically. The researcher recognized this by noticing the expression on their faces. (Mt 31)*

The next step is *Justification for further research,* which is present in the majority of postgraduate writings. It was used in 72.5% of the MA and 85% of the PhD texts. A *Chi*-square analysis indicated no significant differences in the distribution of this step between the two groups. The obvious difference of this step

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with the former step is that in *Justification for further research*, necessity of doing more research is emphasized whereas, in the former, writers are try to justify their work like what they do in the introduction section. Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) gave this step the same label and in *the OARO (Open a Research Option) Model*, Ahmad (1997) called it *Justifying need for research per se* (for Malay scientists*)*. In the following example, the writer, using the phrase *it is necessary*, tried to encourage the readers to bridge the possible gaps in future research by showing the uncharted areas in the current study and giving these areas more attention.

> *6. In order to know whether the differences uncovered in the current study regarding the provision of recasts in mixed- and matched-gender groups have implications for learning, it is necessary to know more about the learning that results from learner-provided recasts. (Pd 6)*

Analysis of Move 3

The third move, *Limitations of the study,* includes three steps: (1) *Presenting the limitations of the previous studies* (7.5% in the MA and 10% in the PhD theses), (2) *Reference to the gap(s) in the present study* (27.5% in the MA and 45% in the PhD theses), (3) *Non-generalizability of the study* (15% in the MA and 20% in the PhD theses). Following Rasmeenin (2006), limitations are presented in order to suggest further research areas and also allow the authors to make judgments about the findings of previous and current studies.

Presenting the limitations of the previous studies, as the first step of move three, though rare, was distributed almost equally across the two datasets. Dudley-Evans (1994, pp. 224-228) suggests that "writers introduce caveats about the findings, methodologies, and claims of previous studies". As the following example demonstrates, the author refers to areas of research which were not thoroughly investigated in previous studies and calls for further investigations in future. However, the low frequency of this step shows that both MA and PhD students do not adequately consider the limitations of previous studies to make further suggestions but prefer to state the deficiencies of their current work.

> *7. There has been little research conducted to determine what other types of motivation students may have. Therefore, carrying out more research with this objective is recommended. (Mt 54)*

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In the second step, *Reference to the gap(s) in the present study,* the author reminds the readers of the gap(s) and limitations of his/her study and points to the relatively unexplored areas of knowledge that need to be addressed in order to add to the current knowledge of the field. In example 8 below, by using the phrase *As for the limitations of the present study*, the researcher acknowledges the small sample used in her study, and in example 9, the author suggests the *untouched interaction of age, gender and self-esteem* as a genuine gap in his study, and immediately provides clear recommendations for future considerations. Although this step was more frequent in the PhD than in the MA theses, a *chi*-square analysis showed no significant difference in using this optional step.

8. As for the limitations of the present study, it can be said that to conduct construct validity research regularly requires large samples, but the sample used in this dissertation was not large enough to manage to include more universities in Iran, together with all existing ESP majors so as to find more valid results and implications. Therefore, future researchers should bear the foregoing facts in their minds … . (Pd 9)

9. The interaction of age, gender and self-esteem that was left untouched in the present study is another potential area that can be handled in further research. (Mt 2)

In *Non-generalizability of the study*, the last step of move three, the writer claims that research users must exercise caution in applying the research findings to their works. Sometimes, the recent findings are ambiguous and cannot be generalized to other situations. There are writers who are aware of the limitations of their study and show them to educators. Note the following example in which the researcher acknowledges that his study failed to provide adequate evidence and was not comprehensive enough to be generalized to other situations. As Table 3 shows, no significant difference was observed in the distribution of this step between the MA and PhD theses.

10. However, the present study is by no means comprehensive and further research is necessary for eliminating limitations of this study and validating its findings. (Pd 1)

Analysis of Move 4

The fourth move, *Recommendations,* as the most important move of our model, was developed through six steps: (1) *Point of departure* (40% in the MA and 50% in the PhD theses), (2) *Recommendations for extending the current study* (100% in

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the MA and 95% in the PhD theses), (3) *Suggestions for repetition of the current study* (15% in the MA and 30% in the PhD theses), (4) *Implications of the study* (5% in the MA and 20% in the PhD theses), (5) *Further research questions* (15% in the MA and 20% in the PhD theses), and finally (6) *The researcher's hopes* (7.5% in the MA and 20% in the PhD corpora). Generally, these steps seem to embrace more research, whether in the form of predictions of future work for extending and/or repeating the current work or in the form of implications, questions or hopes. However, current discussion models of moves and steps consider *Recommendations* as a single move; we propose that, as introduced in the current model, *Suggestions for further research* can be, in fact, a structure having its own generic configuration.

Point of departure, as the first step of move four, which orients the readers' attention to the following parts, is a quasi-obligatory step. As shown in Table 3, a *chi*-square analysis did not indicate any significant difference between the groups with regard to the distribution of this step. In other words, both groups used this step in their corpora almost equally. This step opens the discussion of further suggestions and is usually a single sentence that introduces sentences which are often in the form of questions or suggestions for further research, as seen in examples 11 and 12. That is, this step bridges the gap between the current study and future investigations.

11. In the following section, a few Suggestions for further research are presented. (Pd 17)

12. Research can be conducted to address the following questions. (Pd 49)

Recommendations for extending the current study, as the second and last obligatory step following *Reviewing the methodology* and *Justifications for further research* in the proposed model, was equally distributed across the two corpora. This step usually corresponds to the *Reviewing the methodology* move, pointing out that research is generative and builds on its previous studies in the same field of study. As the following example shows, the researcher reviewed the tests in his study (*proficiency and norm-referenced ESAP tests*) and recommended extensions by studying the other kinds of assessment (*portfolio and self – assessment*).

13. In this study only proficiency norm- referenced ESAP tests were studied. The researchers are recommended to study the other types of assessment such as portfolio and self – assessment and their possible impacts on

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improving ESP learning and teaching process in higher education system of our country. (Pd 2)

The third step, *Suggestions for repetition of the current study*, is an optional step for PhD theses, and a *chi*-square analysis revealed a significant difference in applying this step across the texts. PhD students use it more, probably because their works are longer, and more variables are examined in a single piece of work. Therefore, they expect the readers and educators to replicate parts of their study in order to falsify their results, as seen in the following example.

14. First and foremost, this study can be repeated to find out whether the same results would be obtained. (Mt 17)

Implications of the study announces the practical role(s) of the study in the real world. As reported in Table 3, the PhD students employed this step in 20% of their theses while it occurred in only 5% of the MA data. A *chi*-square analysis marked a significant variation across the two corpora, revealing that PhD students suggest more implications about their study and introduce more new avenues of research. In the following example, the author discusses the implications of his study for language policy makers and educators in Iran with regard to changing their attitudes towards learning English as an international language.

15. One of the most important implications that this study has for language policy makers is the decisive role that English language now plays at the international level, and for language teachers, students should be taught to be more sensitive toward comprehensibility and acceptability rather than imitation of a specific accent or pronunciation. In terms of culture, it is better to conduct instructions toward intercultural understanding rather than cultural imitation. (Pd 13)

As a simple way to present suggestions for further research, the fifth step, *Further research questions,* was not significantly different between the two groups of texts. In *Suggestions for further research*, some authors prefer to write a few suggestions in the form of questions, while in some theses this part is made up of only questions for further research. See the following example in which the researcher presented a few questions as suggestions for further research.

16. Studies may be designed to examine the issue from many other aspects including the following:

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#. Why do the experienced teachers hold a more negative opinion and attitude than the fresh teachers?
#. Why do higher-class families in comparison with lower-class families choose a job other than teaching for their children? (Mt 41)

And finally, in *The researcher's hopes* as the last step of our framework, writers hope their studies and findings will be addressed in other works. *Chi*-square analyses indicated significant differences in using this step between the MA and PhD students (see Table 3). In fact, the PhD students were more inclined to use this move because their works are viewed as having a broader scope than MA theses and they are more confident about the benefits of their results. This step can be seen in the following example in which the author hopes that findings of his study would enhance future research.

17. At the end, the researcher hopes the results obtained from the present study will be fruitful for those involved in language teaching and also open new pages for helping language learners to improve their abilities in learning a new language. (Mt 17)

Analysis of Metadiscourse Features in *Suggestions for further research*

In this stage of analysis, to answer the second research question, the metadiscoursal features of *Suggestions for Further Research* were scrutinized in each move and the corresponding steps. The basic assumption is that generic specifications materialize in linguistic characteristics. Thus, the data were carefully analyzed based on Hyland's model (2005) of metadiscoursal classification, and frequency of occurrence of each metadiscoursal marker was recorded, revealing the distribution of these items in this text type. The fine-grained analysis led to a total of 7191 metadiscoursal items in the MA and PhD theses. In this regard, interactive metadiscourse markers accounted for 50.19% of the total markers employed in the MA theses and 56.11% of the same markers appeared in the PhD theses, while interactional metadiscourse markers accounted for 49.80% of the markers in the MA theses and 43.88% in the PhD theses (see Figure 1). According to Del Saz-Rubio (2011), "it is through a balanced combination of these two types of metadiscoursal features that writers manage to guide readers through the text to position themselves within the wider research context" (p. 261) while they abide by the conventions that underlie academic writing.

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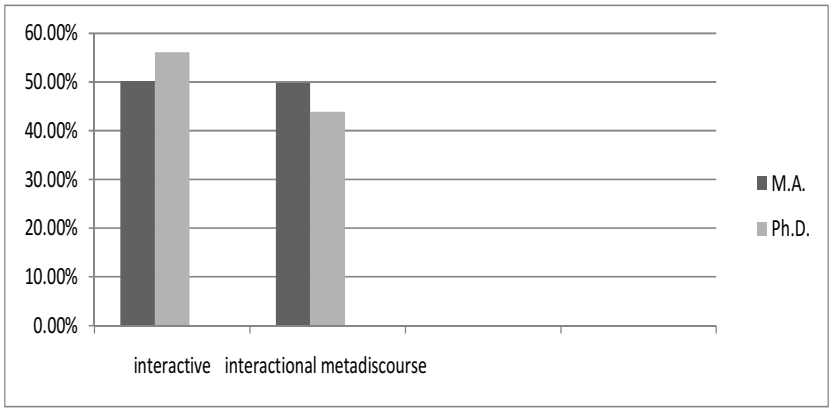


Figure 1: Frequency of Interactive and Interactional Metadiscoursal Items in Suggestions for Further Research

Transitional Markers were the most frequent category in both corpora (32.38% of the total metadiscoursal markers in the MA theses and 35.45% in the PhD theses), followed by Engagement Markers, Hedges, Frame markers, Code Glosses, Boosters, Self Mention, Evidential, Attitude Markers, and finally, Endophoric Markers (0.5% in the MA theses and 1.27% in the PhD theses) (see Figure 2).

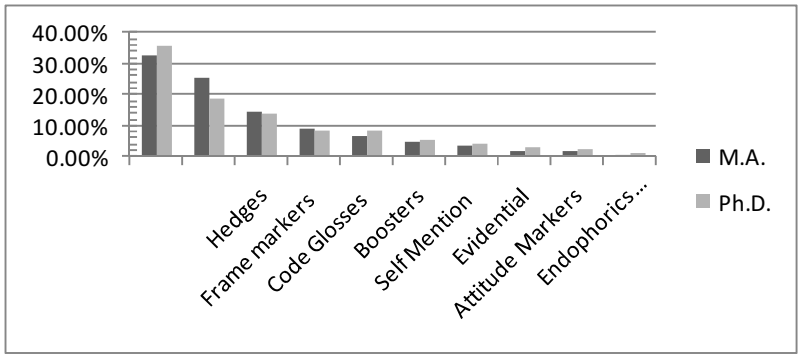


Figure 2: Distribution of Metadiscoursal Markers in Suggestions for Further Research

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A detailed analysis of the metadiscourse features revealed that Transition Markers, which are mainly conjunctions and adverbial phrases and help readers interpret pragmatic relations between sentences in an argument (Hyland, 2005), are the most pervasive category of the four moves of this study. This demonstrates the important role of these markers in constructing and developing an argument and channeling the previous, current, and possible future studies. Hence, they help maintain cohesion in the text. On the other hand, the least frequent category was Endophoric Markers which refer to other parts of the text. This shows that authors rarely need to set off a search backward to refer to the previous sections in this stage of their writing. Using these markers may show support for a previously mentioned assertion because *Suggestions for Further Research* is a gateway for further inquiry. While Endophoric Markers were employed sporadically in the three of the moves, Evidentials, which refer to information in other texts, were distributed remarkably in the *Reviewing the study* move and especially in *Presenting the review of literature,* the second step of this move. This is a predictable distribution because in this step, writers seek previous relevant research and show how their study is related to information in other works (see Appendixes A and B).

In the *Reviewing the study* move*,* Transition Markers were the most frequent elements (189 occurrences in the MA and 259 occurrences in the PhD theses), followed by Engagement, Hedges and Frame markers in the PhD theses, while in the MA theses, the number of Frames exceeded the number of Hedges. However, Attitude markers, which express the writer's stance toward propositions, formed the least used category in this move (18 and 8 in the MA and PhD theses respectively). In the second move, *Significance of the Study,* the same order of importance remained, with Transition Markers being the most frequent category (189 and 455 occurrences in the MA and PhD theses respectively) and Evidentials, which refer to information in other texts, represented the least used metadiscourse markers in this move. A slight deviation in the MA theses was the more frequency of Hedges over Engagement markers. Similarly, the most pervasive metadiscoursal markers in *Limitation of the Study,* as the third move, were Transition Markers in the MA theses (117), whereas Transitions remained noticeably low in the PhD theses. In fact, Hedges and Code Glosses constituted the major categories of *Limitation of the Study* in the PhD theses while Transitions and Hedges together with Engagement markers characterized the MA theses. One distinct feature of this move, as compared to the other moves, was the extremely low number of metadiscourse

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markers. Finally, in the fourth move, *Recommendations*, a single sentence that addresses suggestions or further research questions to readers (Hyland, 2005), Transition markers, Engagement markers, and Hedges were the most prevalent categories while no Evidential markers were exploited in this move (see Appendixes A and B). In sum, aside from the minor differences in the order of metadiscoursal elements in the MA and PhD theses, the findings indicated an emerging picture of the moves revealed in the preferences for metadicoursal markers.

Headings Used for *Suggestions for Further Research* in the MA and PhD Theses

A heading, as the identity of any academic work, is a window into accepting or rejecting the work by members of a discourse community. Thus, headings reflect different purposes and exhibit divergent characteristics (Jalilifar, 2010). Though writing a title might not seem to be a major issue, Dudley-Evans (1984), as long as 28 years ago, recommends teaching non-native students of English how to write an informative title, by scrutinizing various aspects of the genre. Applying the same argument to headings which appear under titles in scholarly works like theses, there seem to be cogent reasons for analyzing the headings of the part genre in focus.

In order to inspect the titles used for this section by the MA and PhD students, different headings of this section were picked and recorded (see Table 4). Though located in nearly a fixed position in all theses, this section is not recognized by a fixed heading as students opt for headings which influence and are influenced by the way they write. Results indicated that the MA students used 11 and the PhD students employed 8 different titles for this fixed section. However, the common title was *Suggestions for further research* which was dominant in both groups. What differed between the groups was that, in the MA theses, *Suggestions for further studies* was the second most frequent, while in the PhD theses, *Suggestions* constituted the second most frequent heading. Other headings were not regularly utilized in the two groups.

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Table 4
Headings Used for the Suggestions for Further Research Section

Headings	MA	%	PhD	%
1) Suggestions for further research	51	63/75	53	66/25
2) Suggestions for further studies	16	20	0	0
3) Suggestions for further investigations	1	1/25	0	0
4) Suggestions for future research	2	2/5	0	0
5) Suggestions	0	0	10	12/5
6) Recommendations for further research	2	2/5	0	0
7) Recommendations for further studies	2	2/5	0	0
8) Recommendations for future studies	0	0	6	7/5
9) Topics for further research	1	1/25	0	0
10) Directions for further research	1	1/25	1	1/25
11) Need for further research	0	0	2	2/5
12) Questions for further research	1	1/25	0	0
13) Future research	2	2/5	6	7/5
14) Future directions	1	1/25	0	0
15) Implications for further research	0	0	1	1/25
16) Avenues for further research	0	0	1	1/25

Conclusion

Over the past two or three decades, the importance of genre knowledge in helping language learners master academic writing has been acknowledged in a conglomerate of studies (Bailey, 2006; Murray & Moore, 2006; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Swales & Feak, 1994, 2000). Writing a thesis can be a major concern for postgraduate students, especially for those non-natives who study at non-English universities but pursue their academic prospects by writing their theses in English. This requires possessing adequate knowledge of English to meet the social norms of thesis writing at the postgraduate level (Bailey, 2006). Therefore, writing a thesis will require enough knowledge of the genre and awareness of certain rules, conventions, and expectations.

We conclude that a comprehensive model for writing the *suggestions for further research* segment in theses and dissertations can involve four major communicative moves. Examining Iranian MA and PhD theses in Applied

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Linguistics illustrated shared and non-shared rhetorical features as well as obligatory and optional steps in *suggestions for further research*. Moreover, exploring the metadiscoursal signals associated with each move and step showed that Transition Markers were the most pervasive category followed by Engagement Markers and hedges, while Endophorics Markers and Evidentials were the least frequent categories distributed in the data.

Generally, one merit of this study is the provision of a detailed, though by no means all-inclusive, model of *Suggestions for Further Research* in theses with the four major moves, described above, along with the corresponding steps and the metadiscoursal features that specify this text. Therefore, the study can promise important implications for non-native students to conform to the conventions or expectations of the discourse community. However, further research is needed to substantiate the results of this study. For instance, the current research has been limited to analyzing a single discipline– Applied Linguistics– and a single part genre in postgraduate theses. We might encourage possibilities for research into other well-explored disciplines such as Education or Medicine and under-researched areas such as History or Agronomy. Further, an alternative approach is to tie rhetorical moves to lexico-grammatical features, such as grammatical metaphor, so that a more extensive model can emerge for writing *Suggestion for Further Research.* Finally, the paper has investigated part of the history of postgraduate theses conducted in Iran. Comparable investigations of this part genre in theses written by native English students are likely to have different outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Metadiscourse Items in Suggestions for Further Research

		Interactive metadiscourse										**Interactional metadiscourse**									
		Code Glosses		Endophoric Markers		Evidentials		Transition Markers		Frame Markers		Attitude Markers		Boosters		Self Mention		Engagement Markers		Hedges	
Moves	**Steps**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**
1 Reviewing the study	1 Reviewing the study	28	29	3	19	*	2	95	189	27	62	15	5	19	39	19	21	88	85	29	68
	2 Reviewing the objectives of the study	*	*	*	*	*	2	14	10	5	15	3	*	*	2	*	1	5	5	*	3
	3 Presenting the review of literature	10	10	6	6	43	104	80	60	39	12	7	3	42	32	*	*	70	63	32	26
2 Significance of the Study	1Emphasizing the newness of the present study	*	*	*	4	*	2	4	22	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	2	*	3
	2 Justification of the present study	2	43	*	7	*	6	15	190	6	38	3	18	4	30	10	45	19	80	40	84
	3 Justification for further research	20	44	2	*	*	*	170	243	36	63	9	4	8	29	8	30	61	131	64	112
3 Limitation of the Study	1 Presenting the limitations of the previous studies	*	3	*	*	*	*	4	15	3	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	6	3	2	13
	2 Indicating the gap(s) of the present study	4	14	*	*	*	*	44	66	2	14	*	4	5	10	8	5	18	13	11	16
	3 Non-generalizability of the study	11	6	*	*	*	*	19	36	4	*	*	*	*	*	4	*	*	*	11	4

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4 Recommendations	1 Point of departure	*	*	3	4	*	*	21	8	*	3	2	*	2	4	7	3	30	25	25	10
	2 Recommendations for extending the current study	83	135	*	8	*	*	355	539	97	113	18	41	46	62	33	65	293	224	192	178
	3 Suggestions for repetition of the current study	10	16	*	*	*	*	25	39	7	11	*	3	5	4	*	3	20	12	15	34
	4 Implications of the study	3	30	*	4	*	*	9	81	4	19	*	7	*	6	*	*	8	50	9	30
	5 Further research questions	19	38	*	2	*	*	37	35	15	12	3	4	2	10	*	4	92	105	5	20
	6 The researcher's hopes	*	3	*	2	*	*	12	24	5	4	*	3	*	12	2	4	4	16	*	18
Total		190	371	14	56	43	116	904	1560	250	366	53	92	133	229	91	177	714	814	399	619
%		6.80	8.43	0.5	1.27	1.54	2.63	32.38	35.45	8.95	8.31	1.89	2.09	4.76	5.20	3.26	4.02	25.58	18.5	14.29	14.06
MA	%	50.19										49.80									
PhD		56.11										43.88									

Appendix B: Metadiscourse in Moves of Suggestions for Further Research

	Interactive metadiscourse										**Interactional metadiscourse**									
	Code Glosses		Endophoric Markers		Evidentials		Transition Markers		Frame Markers		Attitude Markers		Boosters		Self Mention		Engagement Markers		Hedges	
Moves	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**	**MA**	**PhD**
1 Reviewing the study	38	39	9	25	43	18	189	259	71	89	18	8	61	73	19	22	163	153	61	97
2 Significance of the Study	22	87	2	11	*	8	189	455	42	101	9	22	12	59	18	75	80	213	104	199
3 Limitation of the Study	15	23	*	*	*	*	117	9	14	*	*	4	5	10	12	5	24	16	24	33
4 Recommendations	115	222	3	20	*	*	459	726	128	162	23	58	55	87	42	79	447	432	249	290

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