Move Analysis in the Introduction Chapter of Thesis Written by Native English Speakers and Non-Native English Speakers

Chen Dan[1,2], Ramiza Haji Darmi[1] & Mohamad Ateff MD Yusof[3]

[1] Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

[2] College of Foreign Studies, HuBei Normal Universiry, Huangshi, HuBei, China

[3] School of Education, Faculty of Leisure Management & Social Sciences, Taylors University, Malaysia

Correspondence: Ramiza Haji Darmi, Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia. E-mail: ramiza@upm.edu.my

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Abstract

Genre analysis is essential for understanding rhetorical strategies and enhancing communication for academic purposes. However, constructing effective introduction chapter of PhD (ICPhD) thesis remains challenging due to the diverse rhetorical moves influenced by cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This study employs a corpus-based approach to quantitatively and qualitatively analyze the rhetorical moves in 40 ICPhD theses from top universities in Australia and Malaysia submitted between 2017 to 2022 using Bunton's (2002) rhetorical move model. The results reveal significant differences between the two corpora in terms of move frequency, sequence, and cyclicity, as well as the emergence of a new rhetorical move shared by both corpora, especially in Malaysian ICPhD theses. Additionally, the study compares these findings with past research on Australian ICPhD theses (Pawase, 2018), adopting both synchronic and diachronic perspectives to explore the unique challenges posed by language, culture, and educational norms to PhD thesis writers.

Keywords: introduction chapter, PhD theses, move Analysis, Malaysia, Australia

1. Introduction

Producing a PhD thesis is arguably the most demanding literacy task in higher education and it is especially taxing for second language (L2) writers, who struggle with linguistic proficiency and discipline-specific genre conventions (Hyland, 2016; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). The introduction chapter of a thesis is pivotal as it presents the background of the study, frames the research problem, states the objectives of the study, and previews the thesis structure, thereby linking the literature review, methodology, and findings to a unifying question (Swales, 1990, El-Dakhs, 2020). Crafting the introduction chapter requires careful planning, critical thinking, and ability to synthesize diverse research sources, ensuring coherence throughout (Flowerdew, 1998; Hyland, 2006). Thus, L2 writers encounter challenges to balance these rhetorical demands with existing burden of cross-cultural communication (Kawase, 2008).

Genre analysts, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), have explored how doctoral writers meet these demands. Swales' (1990) Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model first formalised the three-move structure of research article introductions. Thus, Bunton (2002) expanded ICPhD theses by adopting a comprehensive move model.

Subsequent studies have applied or adapted Bunton's (2002) model across an impressive range of countries and disciplines. For example, Turkey (Işık, 2021; GEÇİKLİ, 2021), Iran (Esfandiari, 2019), Pakistan (Nasreen, 2022), New Zealand (Bruce, 2018), Thailand (Jogthong, 2001; Saengsai, 2015), Indonesia (Prasetyanti, 2023), Spain (Soler-Monreal et al., 2015), Japan (Ono, 2017), Australia (Paltridge, 2002; Samraj, 2008; Sun, 2022), Malaysia (Arulandu, 2005; Zainuddin, 2021; Shahrbanou, 2019), the United States (Jin, 2016), and the United Kingdom (Kawase, 2018) illustrate the broad application of Bunton's model. The findings of these studies confirm that the model's versatility and reveal countries and disciplinary differences. For instance, Malaysian theses show intensive recursion of Move 3 (Occupying the Niche) (Zainuddin, 2021; Faharol, 2021), Iranian theses foreground Definitional clarification moves (Esfandiari, 2019), and Sun's (2022) large corpus documents widespread use of negation within Move 2 (Establishing a Niche). Comparative work further stresses the need to refine existing frameworks. Kawase (2018), for instance, analysed ICPhD theses from four English-dominant countries, Işık-Taş (2021) contrasted 25 theses with 25 introductions of research article, and Abdolmalaki (2019) compared traditional and article-based theses. Large-scale surveys show variability. Mauludini's (2020) study on 120 abstracts and Li's (2020) multi-thousand abstract review propose a new Structure step. Other lines of inquiry examine coherence markers (Nasir, 2022), deviations from Hyland's framework in Turkish postgraduate writing (Sükan, 2022), and the rhetorical use of direct quotation in Japanese ICs (Ono, 2017).

Past studies on the move model have not dealt with these two aspects: many studies focus on a single language context or rely solely on Swales' CARS model, potentially overlooking the contextual differences in PhD theses across diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Secondly, few studies have examined the variation in rhetorical moves (RMs) sequences between native and non-native English contexts,

particularly in the field of applied linguistics (ALs).

Kachru' s (1992) model of the global spread of English situates Malaysia in the Outer Circle, where a substantial population is proficient in English as L2, and English plays a prominent role in higher education. The Malaysian government has consistently recognized the importance of English in education, particularly at the tertiary level. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 emphasises the need for enhanced English proficiency to meet the demands of an increasingly interconnected world (Engku, 2020). Therefore, PhD theses evaluation is crucial to align academic standards with international benchmarks and improve educational outcomes (Malaysian Education Blueprint Annual Report, 2013). In contrast, Australia's education system is seen as excellent globally. Due to its geographical proximity, many Malaysian students pursue their education in Australia, which has a significant impact on Malaysian education and academic exchanges. Therefore, evaluating the level of academic writing in higher education in Malaysia and Australia will help improve the academic writing level of Malaysian PhD students.

To address the gaps highlighted in earlier works, the present study applies Bunton's (2002) move model to reexamine ICPhD theses in a broader context. It proceeds from the premise that academic writing conventions differ systematically across languages and settings (Hyland, 2016), PhD students in higher education often struggle to master the rhetorical strategies these conventions require (Darmi et al., 2024). By tracing how RMs vary across cultural contexts and duration, and by comparing the findings with Kawase's (2018) analysis of Australian theses written a decade ago, the study offers both cross-cultural and diachronic perspectives on doctoral writing. Specifically, this research focuses on two main objectives: 1) examining the frequency, sequence, and cyclicity of RMs in 40 ICPhD theses written by both NES and NNES in the field of ALs; and 2) identifying new RMs in these 40 ICPhD theses and comparing these findings with the findings of Pawase (2018). In so doing, it refines Bunton's (2002) move model and provides a more detailed account of ICPhD thesis organisation, thereby advancing scholarship on academic writing.

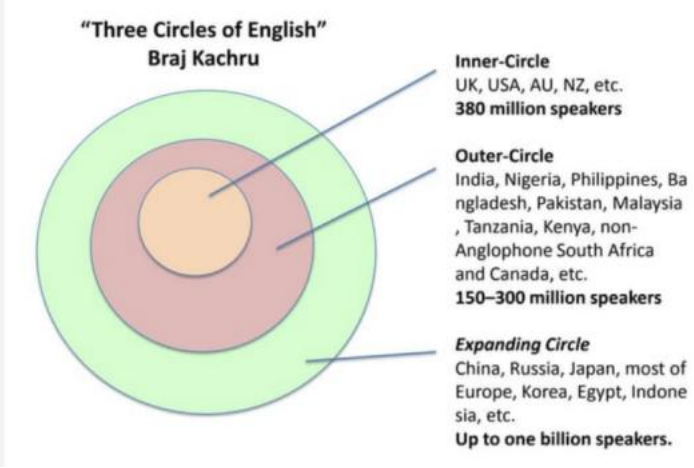

Figure 1. Three Circles of English' Model by Kachru (1985)

2. Literature Review

2.1 Genre Analysis in English for Specific Purposes

The term "genre" originates from the Latin word 'genus', meaning kind or class. According to Swales (1990), the essence of understanding genre lies in its communicative function within the routine discourse of a specific community and the extent to which a text serves a particular communicative purpose. English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which originated in the early 1960s, was a response to the growth of English as a commercial language worldwide, as well as the globalisation of world markets. ESP is a branch of ALs, which aims to facilitate communication and to promote the social and psychological integration of writers into the target professional or academic community, where communication is predominantly in English (Paltridge et al., 2012). Scholars in the field of ESP have endeavoured to identify its key areas, such as needs analysis, genre, corpus studies, and specialized language skills and lexis.

Swales' (1990) conceptualization of genre has been foundational in ESP genre research, exerting a profound influence on subsequent studies. Hyland (2009, 2016) in his work, Teaching and Researching Writing, and within the framework of ESP, involves examining and understanding discursive practices within academic and professional contexts, with a strong focus on the relationship between context and specific genre knowledge. In the ESP framework, communicative purpose is central to defining a genre, serving as a core criterion for its identification. While communicative purpose is pivotal, elements such as rhetorical strategies and textual content are also critical in shaping a genre. Together, these components help maintain the genre's coherence by focusing on shared RMs that align with its communicative objectives.

2.2 Rhetorical Moves

In ESP, genre analysis often centres on a text's 'move structure' segments serving distinct communicative functions. Crooks (1986) defines RMs as the deliberate linguistic choices writers make to fulfil aims such as persuading, emphasising, or engaging readers. Since

the globalisation of academic discourse, researchers have mapped moves in numerous genres: university lectures (e.g., Valerija, 2016; Widodo, 2020; Gürbüz, 2021), research articles across disciplines (Cortes, 2013; Omidian et al., 2018; Li et al., 2021; Deng, 2022), and specific research article (RA) sections (Zhang, 2016; Sadek, 2017; Geng, 2023). Similar work has charted entire theses and dissertations (Dudley-Evans, 1998; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Thompson, 2005) or focused on individual chapters: abstracts (El-Dakhs, 2020; Liu, 2022), introductions (Bunton, 2002; Ono, 2017; Pawase, 2018), literature reviews (Kwan, 2006; Chen, 2019), discussions (Ahmadi, 2021; Bruce, 2018), and conclusions (Bunton, 2005; Soler, 2019). Findings consistently show that cultural norms, disciplinary conventions, and author backgrounds shape rhetorical strategy. Therefore, more research is needed on how writer's background influences move usage. Addressing this gap, the present study compares PhD theses of native English speakers (NES) and non-native English speakers (NNES) writers, contributing fresh insight into cross-linguistic variation in academic writing.

Swales (1990) introduced move analysis as a framework for understanding RAs. This framework led to the development of CARS model, which identifies three primary communicative purposes (or moves). Based on Swales's (1990) and Dudley-Evans' (1986) models, Bunton (2002) created a move model that consists of three obligatory moves: Establishing a Territory (M1), Establishing a Niche (M2), and Occupying the Niche (M3). In addition to the steps shared with the Swales and Dudley-Evans models, Bunton also identified more new steps. These include Defining Terms, Indicating a Problem or Need, and Method, Materials/Subjects, Product of Research/Model Proposal, Chapter Structure, Research Questions/Hypotheses, Theoretical Position, Application of Product, and Evaluation of Product. The present study aims to enrich the existing literature and move model by explaining variations in PhD theses written by NES and NNES writers, shedding light on cross-linguistic differences in academic writing.

Table 1. Bunton's (2002) Move Model

Move1 Establishing Territory	
Step1: Claiming centrality(importance of topic)	
Step 2: Making topic generalizations and giving the background information	
Step 3: **Defining terms*	[Parameters of research]
Step 4: Reviewing related literature	
Move2 Establishing a Niche	
Step 1a: Indicating a gap in research	
Step 1b: *Indicating a problem or need*	
Step 1c: Question-raising	
Step 1d: Continuing/Extending a tradition	[Counter-claiming]
Move3: Occupying the Niche	
Step 1: Purposes, aims or objectives	[Chapter structure]
Step2: Work carried out/ Announcing research	[Research questions/ Hypotheses]
Step 3 *Method*	
Step 4 *Materials or Subjects*	[Theoretical positioning]
Step 5 Findings or Results (Announcing or predicting principle findings)	*Defining terms
Step 6 *Product research/ Model proposed*	[Parameters of research]
Step 7 *Justification/Significance*	
Step 8 T*hesis Structure*	[Application of product]
	[Evaluation of product]

Newly identified steps are in italics.

**Indicates a new step proposed by Bunton which can appear in the first or third moves.*

[ ] Indicates a step that is occasionally present, according to Bunton.

Source: Bunton's (2002) study of the introductions of PhD theses

3. Methodology

This study uses a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The first phase identifies and analyzes RMs in NES and NNES ICPhD theses using a corpus-based approach, while the second phase applies qualitative methods to further interpret and explore the findings from the initial analysis.

3.1 Corpora

Six criteria for inclusion in the corpus were applied: 1. The theses were from five of the Group of Eight (Go8) universities in Australia and Universiti Putra Malaysia, 2. The theses were written in English, 3. The theses were submitted to the respective universities between 2017 and 202s, 4. The theses were accessible from open access databases, 5. The theses' titles have the word 'language' or 'linguistics', and 6. The language background of the PhD writers were confirmed through surname databases (e.g. http:// www. surnamedb.com/Surname/ and http:// www. archives. com/ search/ obituary? lastName = ellis&location=US). For the NNES PhD writers' language background, the researcher confirmed it with the supervisors who are Malaysians.

3.2 Data Collection

The research process began by downloading 40 open access AL PhD theses from Malaysian and Australian university libraries in PDF format. Each thesis was numbered (e.g., NES1, NNES1) and were converted to .txt format. Chapters not relevant for the study namely, acknowledgements, abstracts, literature reviews, methodologies, results, discussions, conclusions, references, and appendices including tables, figures, quotations, and paraphrases, were removed to avoid interference in identifying RMs. Table 2 presents the total word count of the introduction chapters as reported in Microsoft Word.

Table 2. Overview of the Two Corpora

Corpora	No. of PhD theses	Word count
NES	3	27216
NNES	3	29526
Total	6	56742

3.3 Data Analysis

The study uses Kanoksilapatham's (2005) 60% threshold to classify RMs as obligatory (appearing in more than 60% of texts) or optional (appearing in fewer than 60%). Coding strategies from Soler-Monreal (2010) and Moreno and Swales (2018) were applied to analyze ICPhd theses, focusing on sentences, words, phrases, and paragraphs.

3.4 Inter-coder Reliability

To ensure reliability, 15% of the PhD theses (6) were randomly selected and coded by the researcher and two genre analysis experts. Coders received training on the study's objectives and Bunton's (2002) move model. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, resulting in strong inter-coder agreement with a Cohen's Kappa value of 0.612.

4. Results

4.1 Overview of the PhD Thesis in Both Corpora

Table 3 presents the total page and word counts of ICPhD theses in both the NES and NNES corpora. The NNES corpus has an average of approximately 5,761 words and exhibits relatively consistent lengths. In contrast, the NES corpus shows a wider range in terms of word counts, spanning from 2,356 to 13,628 words. The NES corpus demonstrates greater variability in the structure and composition of its introductions compared to the NNES corpus.

Table 3. Overview of Introduction Chapters PhD Theses in Both Corpora

Thesis	No. of pages in Introduction		No. of Words	
	NES	NNES	NES	NNES
T 1	8	15	2480	5764
T 2	18	17	5567	6917
T 3	4	10	2777	3640
T 4	24	20	9602	7609
T 5	38	13	11080	4453
T 6	57	11	11269	4131
T 7	21	11	5088	4386
T 8	40	15	9707	7148
T 9	11	17	2356	7594
T 10	10	19	2294	7884
T 11	25	16	8542	7329
T 12	6	19	1508	8086
T 13	17	13	7952	6031
T 14	37	18	13628	8458
T 15	5	21	1579	6156
T 16	12	12	4439	3918
T 17	14	7	3423	2667
T 18	13	10	3661	3812
T 19	26	13	7067	5199
T 20	4	13	1667	4027
Mean	19.5	14.5	5784	5761

4.2 Identification and Essentiality of RM in the Three Corpora

Table 4 displays the number of ICPhD theses that incorporated each step, comparing these with Kawase's (2018) ICPhD theses in ALs. It includes the frequency, percentage, and essentiality of each step.

This study has shown the presence of all three moves in the three corpora, demonstrating their obligatory nature. Each move uniquely contributes to constructing a coherent academic introduction. In the NES corpus, eight steps are identified as obligatory and 16 steps as optional, indicating a high degree of flexibility. Only one step, Move 3 Step 11 (Evaluation of Product), was not identified. Conversely, two steps originally considered optional, Move 3 Step 8 (Theoretical Positions) and Move 3 Step 9 (Parameters of Research), which define the study's relevant scope, have become obligatory. Additionally, the steps Making Topic Generalization' (M1S2), Reviewing Previous Research (M1S4), Indicating a Problem or Need (M2S1B), and Purposes, Aims or Objectives (M3S1) were performed in nearly all theses (95% and 90%, respectively), demonstrating their importance in establishing the foundation of the thesis.

In contrast, the NNES corpus exhibits significant deviations from Bunton's model and the NES identification of essential steps, with five steps absent in Malaysian ICPhD theses. There are only three obligatory steps: M2S3 (Presenting positive justification), M3S4 (Announcing present research descriptively and/or purposively), M3S3C (Indicating principal outcomes), M3S3D (Stating the value of the present research), and M3S11 (Evaluation of product). Conversely, five steps have become mandatory in the Malaysian corpus, including M1S3B (Establishing research parameters), M3S6 (Chapter Structure), M3S7 (Research Questions/Hypotheses), M3S8 (Theoretical Positions), and M3S9 (Parameters of Research). This indicates that NNES corpus generally adhere more strictly to obligatory moves than the NES corpus.

Table 4. Frequency, Percentage, and Essentiality of Rhetorical Moves

Moves	NSE			NNSE			Kawase(2018)		
	Freq. N=20	Per. 100%	Essentiality	Freq. N=20	Per. 100%	Essentiality	Freq. N=20	Per. 100%	Essentiality
Move1Establishing Territory									
Step1: Claiming centrality	1	5	Optional	17	85	Obligatory	19	95	Obligatory
Step 2: Making topic generalization and giving the background information	19	95	Obligatory	20	100	Obligatory	18	90	Obligatory
*Step 3A: *Defining terms*	*10*	*50*	Optional	20	100	Obligatory	2	10	Optional
Step 3B: Establishing research parameters	11	55	Optional	*14*	*70*	Obligatory	*2*	10	Optional
Step 4: Reviewing previous research	17	85	Obligatory	20	*100*	*Obligatory*	19	95	Obligatory
Move 2 Establishing a Niche									
Step 1a: Indicating a gap in research	11	55	Optional	18	90	Obligatory	15	75	Obligatory
Step 1b: Indicating a problem or need	18	90	Obligatory	11	55	Optional	10	50	Optional
Step 2: Question-raising	7	35	Optional	6	30	Optional	*5*	25	Optional
Step 3: Counter-claiming	*1*	*5*	Optional	*0*	*0*	*N/A*	2	10	Optional
Step4: Extending a tradition	1	5	Optional	0	0	*N/A*	5	25	Optional
Move 3: Occupying the Niche									
Step 1: Purposes, aims or objectives	18	90	Obligatory	20	100	Obligatory	17	85	Obligatory
Step 2: Starting Work carried out	11	55	Optional	6	30	Optional	17	85	Obligatory
Step 3A: Method	11	55	Optional	2	10	Optional	9	45	Optional
Step 3B: Materials or Subjects	11	55	Optional	1	5	Optional	11	55	Optional
Step 3C: Findings or Results	9	45	Optional	0	0	*N/A*	5	25	Optional
Step 3D: Product of research/ Model proposal	3	15	Optional	0	0	*N/A*	2	10	Optional
Step 4: Justification/Significance	17	85	Obligatory	20	100	Obligatory	11	55	Optional
Step 5: Thesis Structure	19	95	Obligatory	9	45	Optional	17	85	Obligatory
Step 6: Chapter Structure	*3*	*15*	Optional	*15*	*75*	*Obligatory*	8	40	Optional
Step 7: Research Questions/Hypotheses	*11*	*55*	Optional	*17*	*85*	*Obligatory*	15	75	Obligatory
Step 8: Theoretical Positions	*12*	*60*	Obligatory	*12*	*60*	*Obligatory*	9	45	Optional
Step 9: Parameters of Research	*13*	*65*	Obligatory	*12*	*60*	*Obligatory*	2	10	Optional
Step 10: Application of product	*7*	*35*	Optional	*8*	*40*	Optional	0	0	
Step11: Evaluation of product	*0*	*0*	*N/A*	*0*	*0*	*N/A*	2	10	Optional
Step 12: Summary of the Chapter	**2**	**10**	**Optional**	**13**	**65**	**Obligatory**			

N=refers to the total number of analyzed PhD Thesis Introduction inthis study

% refers to the frequency of occurrence of a step

N/A refers to not applicable

Table 4 presents NES and NNES corpora with Kawase's (2018) analysis of Australian ICPhD theses. Clear contrasts emerge particularly for the NNES corpus. NNES PhD writers treat Defining Terms as obligatory in every text and assign an obligatory status to Establishing Research Parameters in 70% theses, whereas Kawase recorded these two steps in only 10 percent of his sample and judged them optional. They also insist on Justification/Significance (100 percent obligatory), place less weight on an early Thesis Structure statement (45 percent optional compared with Kawase's 85 percent obligatory), and close more often with a Summary of the Chapter (65 percent obligatory rather than Kawase's 10 percent optional).

Two distinct rhetorical conventions are found. NNES PhD writers favour an explicit, rule-driven approach, possibly reflecting institutional guidelines or a desire to foreground clarity for an international readership. On the other hand, NES PhD writers retain most core moves but appear more selective at the periphery, downplaying direct claims of centrality and displaying greater variation overall. Thus, the findings confirm that RMs realisation is shaped by both linguistic background and evolving disciplinary norms. NNES ICPhD theses are incline toward maximal explicitness, whereas NES ICPhD theses adopt a selectively flexible, reader-oriented stance.

4.3 Overall Occurrence of RM in the Three Corpora

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the identification and essentiality of moves and steps detailed in the previous section, Table 5 highlights insights into the occurrence frequency and percentage of RMs for the three corpora.

Table 5. The Overall Occurrence of Rhetorical Moves in the Three Corpora

Moves	NSE		NNSE		Pawase' Study	
	Freq.	Percentage (100)	Freq.	Percentage (100)	Freq.	Percentage (100)
Move1 Establishing Territory	255	36.7	266	49	185	37.1
Move 2 Establishing a Niche	84	12.1	72	13.4	79	15.8
Move 3 Occupying the Niche	356	51.2	205	37.6	235	47.1
Total	695	100	543	100	499	100

The findings present that the NES corpus allocates the majority of its introduction chapters to M3, placing slightly less emphasis on M1 and dedicating the least attention to M2. In contrast, the NNES PhD corpus prioritizes M1, dedicating nearly half of its introduction chapters to establishing extensive background context, while still incorporating a substantial portion of M3 and allocating minimal focus to M2. Kawase's study reveals a more balanced pattern, with a strong emphasis on M 3, similar to the NES corpus, considerable attention to M1, falling between the NES and NNES corpora and a comparatively higher proportion of M 2 than either of the other two corpora.

These differences suggest that the NNES corpus places the greatest emphasis on establishing the research territory (M1). In contrast, the NES corpus focuses more on occupying the niche and detailing the study's aims and methods (M3). Kawase's study occupies a middle ground, displaying a more evenly distributed focus across the three moves, with relatively greater attention given to explicitly setting the niche (M2) compared to the NES or NNES corpora. Although all three corpora treat Move 2 as the least emphasized component, Kawase's study highlights a small yet notable shift, giving slightly more weight to presenting research gaps and contributions.

Table 6. The Concurrences of Each Step in Three Moves

Move 1	NSE		NNSE	
	Freq.	Percentage (100)	Freq.	Percentage (100)
Step1: Claiming centrality (importance of topic)	3	1.1	18	6.8
Step 2: Making topic generalization and giving the background information	74	29	76	28.6
*Step 3A: *Defining terms*	19	7.5	17	6.4
Step 3B: Establishing research parameters	21	8.2	24	9.0
Step 4: Reviewing previous research	138	54.1	131	49.2
Total	255	100	266	100
Move 2				
Step1A: Indicating a gap in research	20	23.8	43	59.7
Step 1B: *Indicating a problem or need*	50	59.5	22	30.6
Step 2: Question-raising	10	11.9	7	9.7
Step 3: *Counter-claiming*	3	3.6	0	0
Step 4: Extending a tradition	1	1.1	0	0
Total	84	100	72	100
Move 3				
Step1: Purposes, aims or objectives	57	16	63	30.3
Step 2 Starting Work carried out	27	7.6	13	6.3
Step 3A: Method	24	6.7	2	0.1
Step 3B: Materials or Subjects	27	7.5	1	0.05
Step 3C: Findings or Results	20	5.6	0	0
Step 3D: Product of research/ Model proposal	4	1.1	0	0
Step 4: Justification/Significance	48	13.5	25	12.2
Step 5: Thesis Structure	21	5.9	12	5.9
Step 6: Chapter Structure	4	1.1	11	5.4
Step 7: Research Questions/Hypotheses	15	4.2	17	8.3
Step 8: Theoretical Positions	56	15.7	14	6.8
Step 9: Parameters of Research	40	11.2	23	11.2
Step 10: Application of product	11	3.1	12	5.9
Step11: Evaluation of product	0	0	0	0
Step 12: Summary of the Chapter	2	0.6	12	5.9
Total	356	100	205	100

The primary difference in M1 is found in S1 (Claiming centrality), which highlights the significance of the research area (Example NES-14). Notably, one ICPhD thesis in the NNES corpus begins with Step 2 (Example NNES-6). This step offers a broad overview of the research topic, provides essential background information to underscore its relevance, and sets the stage for specific discussions by outlining key concepts, theories, or historical developments.

Example NES-14: Researching the task-as-activity would also inform evidence-based teaching practice in other kinds of multi-proficiency-level classes. ① For this reason, the focus of the study at this stage is not on the pedagogy of the sessions, but rather on participation within them.②

Example NNES-6: The profession of doctor are perceived noble, responsible person for saving patients' lives by treating illnesses effectively (Shortliffe, 2012). ① In recent years, scholars recognized the perception about the knowledge of communication leads to contribution through healing process in the healthcare (Hargie, 2004; 2010&2011). ② The healthcare information that is conveyed by the doctors would enable the patients to understand via verbal and nonverbal communication where patients are comfortable to share information about their health issues with their doctors. ③

Table 6 also highlights significant differences in Move 2, Step 1A (Indicating a Gap in Research) is more frequent in the NNES corpus (59.7%) than in the NES corpus (23.8%), suggesting a stronger focus on identifying research gaps (Example NNES-15). Conversely, Step 1B (Indicating a Problem or Need) is more common in the NES corpus (59.5%) than in the NNES corpus (30.6%), indicating a greater emphasis on highlighting problems or needs (Example NES-7). For Step 2 (Question-raising), the NES corpus has a slightly higher frequency (11.9%) than the NNES corpus (9.7%). Steps 3 (Counter-claiming) and 4 (Extending a Tradition) are found only in the NES corpus. Overall, the NNES corpus focuses on indicating research gaps, while the NES corpus emphasizes identifying problems or needs, raising questions, counter-claiming, and extending traditions.

Example NNES-15: The results of this acoustic analysis will no doubt guide teaching and learning in the field of Hausa phonetics by exploring the acoustic features of Hausa stops, which according to the existing literature has never been examined.

Example NES-7: other problem resulting from this has focused on the graduate qualities is knowledge-blindness, i.e., focusing on knowing how rather than knowing what.

Nevertheless, Move 3 in both corpora highlights several notable differences. In the NNES corpus, steps like "Purposes, aims, or objectives (30.3%), Chapter Structure (5.4%), Research Questions/ Hypotheses (8.3%), and Summary of the Chapter (5.9%) are more frequently used compared to the NES corpus, which has 16%, 1.1%, 4.2%, and 0.6% respectively for these steps. This indicates that the NNES corpus places greater emphasis on setting the objectives and summarizing the structure of the research. Conversely, the NES corpus demonstrates a more detailed approach in steps such as Method (6.7%), Materials or Subjects (7.5%), and Theoretical Positions (15.7%), compared to the NNES corpus, which has significantly lower frequencies for these steps (0.1%, 0.05%, and 6.8% respectively). Additionally, the NES corpus includes steps like Findings or Results, which involves presenting the findings or results of the research (Example NES-3), and Product of Research/ Model Proposal, which describes the product or outcome of the research (Example NES-6). These steps are absent in the NNES corpus. This indicates that the NES corpus offers more comprehensive methodological details, reflecting a different approach to structuring research introductions.

Example NES-3: This thesis finds that phonotactics, extracted at the relatively simple level of binary and frequency-based biphone characters, do show evidence of containing phylogenetic signal. (NES-3)

Example NES-20: This alignment turns out to influence the ability to correctly comprehend the meaning of syntactically complex sentences (such as this one), with accompanying the effects on sensorimotor coordination and neural entrainment.

4.4 Move Sequences in Both Corpora

The sequence of moves is essential for analyzing genre characteristics because cycling entails the repeated application of RMs throughout the text (Zhao et al., 2019). Table 7 illustrates both commonalities and contrasts in the opening move, closing move, and cyclical move.

Table 7. Move Sequences of the Introduction Chapters in Both Corpora

	Introduction	Opening Move	%	Closing Move	%	Recurring Move
NSE N=20	Move1: Establishing Territory	14	70	0	0	106
	Move2: Establishing a Niche	0	0	0	0	54
	Move 3: Occupying the Niche	6	30	20	100	98
NNSE N=20	Move1: Establishing Territory	5	25	2	10	127
	Move2: Establishing a Niche	0	0	0	0	57
	Move 3: Occupying the Niche	15	75	18	90	102

In the NES corpus, Move 1 (Establishing a Territory) is the opening move in 70% of introductions, while Move 3 (Occupying a Niche) is the opening move in 30% and serves as the closing move in all introductions. Conversely, the NNES corpus predominantly uses Move 3 as the opening move in 75% of introductions, followed by Move 2 (Establishing a Niche). For closing moves, Move 3 is employed in 90% of NNES PhD TICs, with Move 1 used in 10% of cases. This indicates that the NES PhD corpus favour Move 1 for openings, while the NNES corpus prefer Move 3, though both corpora commonly use Move 3 as the closing move.

Regarding move cyclicity, the NNES corpus exhibits more cyclical moves than the NES corpus. Move 1 is the most frequent cyclical move in both corpora, occurring 106 times in the NES corpus and 127 times in the NNES corpus. A Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test showed a significant difference (X2 (1) = 1.8927, p = 0.1689 < 0.5). Move 3 is the second most frequent cyclical move, appearing 98 times in the NES corpus and 102 times in the NNES corpus, with no statistical difference (X^2 (1) = 0.08, p = 0.7773 > 0.5). Move 2 is the least frequent cyclical move, appearing 54 times in the NES corpus and 57 times in the NNES corpus, also showing no statistical difference (X^2 (1) = 0.081, p = 0.7758 > 0.5).

4.5 Move Cyclicity of the Introduction Chapters in Both Corpora

The elaboration of move sequences reflects how writers structure their introductions, often leading to move cycling (Soler, 2005). While the M1-M2-M3 sequence was the most common pattern in ICPhD theses, other cyclic patterns were also utilized in both corpora. Table 8 provides a detailed overview of the various move patterns observed in the two corpora.

Table 8. Move Cyclicity of the Introduction Chapters in Both Corpora

	NES	NNES
Move patterns	$[M1\text{-}M2\text{-}M3]^n$	$[M3]\text{-}[M1\text{-}M2]^n\text{-}[M1\text{-}M3]^n/[M3]$
	$[M3\text{-}M1]^n\text{-}M2$	$[M3\text{-}M1]^n\text{-}M2$
	$[M3\text{-}M1]^n\text{-}[M1\text{-}M2]^n$	$[M1\text{-}M2]^n\text{-}[M3]$
	$[M1\text{-}M2]^n\text{-}M3/[M3\text{-}M1]^n$	$[M1\text{-}M3]^n\text{-}[M2]$
	$[M1\text{-}M2\text{-}M3]^n\text{-}[M1\text{-}M2]^n/[M1\text{-}M3]^n$	

In the NES corpus, there is a slight tendency to maintain more conventional cycles, such as $[M1\text{-}M2\text{-}M3]^n$ The pattern $[M3\text{-}M1]^n\text{-}M2$ focuses on contributions and context before highlighting the research gap. The pattern $[M3\text{-}M1]^n\text{-}[M1\text{-}M2]^n$ balances discussing contributions and context with establishing the research gap. The pattern $[M1\text{-}M2]^n\text{-}M3/[M3\text{-}M1]^n$ emphasizes context and gap before summarizing contributions. Lastly, $[M1\text{-}M2\text{-}M3]^n\text{-}[M1\text{-}M2]^n/[M1\text{-}M3]^n$ ensures a comprehensive initial coverage followed by a refined focus on either context and gap or context and contributions. These patterns illustrate the intricate and varied ways in which PhD TICs are structured in the NES corpus.

In contrast, the NNES corpus reveal a different pattern, that is $[M3]\text{-}[M1\text{-}M2]^n\text{-}[M1\text{-}M3]^n/[M3]$ starts and ends with emphasizing research contributions, with repeated focus on context and gaps in between. The $[M3\text{-}M1]^n\text{-}M2$ pattern alternates between contributions and context, concluding with the research gap. The $[M1\text{-}M2]^n\text{-}[M3]$ pattern heavily emphasizes context and identifying the research gap, finishing with detailing contributions. Lastly, $[M1\text{-}M3]^n\text{-}[M2]$ focuses on setting context and contributions, ending with the research gap. Each pattern reflects a unique balance between providing background, highlighting research gaps, and emphasizing the significance of the research. These patterns reflect different approaches to balancing context, contributions, and the identification of research gaps in thesis introductions.

The move patterns for both corpora show distinct differences in structuring ICPhD theses. The NES corpus favour balanced and structured approaches, repeating the sequence of establishing territory, establishing a niche, and occupying the niche ($[M1\text{-}M2\text{-}M3]^n$) and alternating between moves to emphasize both context and contributions before addressing gaps. In contrast, the NNES corpus often begins with chapter move ([M3]) and then balance context and gaps, repeating sequences like establishing territory with establishing a niche ($[M1\text{-}M2]^n$) or with occupying the niche ($[M1\text{-}M3]^n$). This indicates that the NES corpus prioritize a comprehensive coverage of all moves, while the NNES corpus emphasize chapter general structures early on and subsequently address context and gaps.

5. Discussion

This study has described a comprehensive analysis of RMs by employing ICPhD theses from Australian (NES) and Malaysian (NNES) corpora. The study reveals patterns of convergence and divergence across the three corpora and with past related research, shedding light on the influence of cross-linguistic background on academic writing.

5.1 Overall Occurrence of RM Across the Three Corpora

The analysis of identification and sequences reveals distinct patterns in the emphasis placed on RMs. Firstly, both corpora include a new step Chapter Summary, which may reflect a modern trend in academic thesis writing, influenced by increasing expectations for reader guidance and accessibility in lengthy academic texts since the certain step did not occur in Kawase's (2018) study. The NNES PhD corpus prioritize establishing M1 more heavily while M3 appeared significantly more frequently in the NES corpus, reflecting native-English academic conventions that prioritize the explicit articulation of research aims and methodological positioning. In contrast, Kawase's (2018) study represents a balanced approach, with a relatively even distribution across the three moves and a greater emphasis on explicitly setting the niche (M2) compared to both NES and NNES corpora. While all three corpora treat M2 as the least emphasized component, Kawase's findings reveal a small but noteworthy shift, placing slightly more importance on presenting research gaps and contributions. This diachronic comparison highlights the evolution of rhetorical practices in the NES corpus, reflecting a shift towards a more niche-focused approach in thesis introductions nowadays, indicative of changes in academic writing conventions and the increasing specialization of research over the past decade.

This variation aligns with Prasetyanti's (2023) findings and can be explained by several factors. First, L2 writers often face challenges with conciseness due to limited proficiency and the perceived need to demonstrate linguistic competence (Mirahayuni, 2002). Second, cultural and disciplinary conventions shape writing styles. The NNES corpus may be less familiar with the succinctness valued in NES academic contexts, resulting in more elaborate narratives. Additionally, NES PhD TICs exhibit greater variability and flexibility, whereas NNES PhD TICs tend to follow more standardized structures. This observation is consistent with the findings of Ge ̧ikli (2021) and Fudhla et al. (2014), who noted that the formality and structural components of introductions vary with length, and the diversity in text lengths within NES PhD TICs reflects this characteristic.

5.2 Frequency of Rhetorical Moves in the Introduction Chapter Across the Three Corpora

A significant difference appears in M1S1 (Claiming centrality), which is less prominent in the NES corpus compared to the NNES corpus, as well as studies by Bunton (2002) and Soler (2011), both of which underscore its importance. Zainuddin's (2021) shows that Malaysian ICPhD theses highlight that Claiming centrality often embed with Moves 2 and 3. Consequently, the relative absence of M1S1 within the

NES corpus may stem from its integration with steps in other moves.

Move 2, which involves identifying gaps and justifying the need for the study, serves as a critical bridge between Move 1 (what has been done) and Move 3 (what the current research entails) (Swales & Feak, 2012). Table 6 confirms that Move 2 is the least frequent move. This finding is consistent with past studies (Bunton, 2002; Mehmood & Khan, 2014; Thuy Nguyen & Pramoolsook, 2014; Sheldon, 2011; Soler-Monreal et al., 2011), that many IC of thesis often omit Move 2. Prior studies also notes that Asian writers, including Malaysian, tend to describe the educational setting rather than critique past research, thereby sidestepping gap-identification (Mehmood & Khan, 2014; Taylor & Chen, 1991; Zhang, 2010; Işık-Taş, 2021). In this study, NNES PhD writers devote proportionally more text to stating explicit research gaps, whereas NES PhD writers more often highlight a problem or need. This reversal of earlier patterns may reflect disciplinary expectations in AL or shifting local academic conventions.

Move 3 reveals the clearest contrast in both corpora. The NES corpus demonstrates a strong preference for Move 3, echoing findings by Bunton (2002), Zhang (2010), Sheldon (2011), and Pawase (2018) that L1 writers often devote extensive space to detailing their current research. In contrast, the NNES corpus tend to downplay detailed descriptions of research subjects or materials, placing greater focus on explaining problems or justifying the need for their study. This aligns with the findings of Arulandu (2005), Zainuddin (2021), and Prasetyanti (2023), who found that NNES ICPhD these in ALs often prioritize elaborating on the rationale and evidence for conducting their research while simplifying detailed discussions of implementation. These differences in the emphasis and application of Move 3 highlight the influence of language proficiency, cultural background, and academic conventions on RMs in ICPhD theses.

Finally, a diachronic glance at Australian theses over the past decade shows that Australian PhD theses (NES) have shifted slightly toward a greater focus on Move 3 (Occupying the Niche) suggesting an increase in the detail provided about the study's contributions. Additionally, Move 2 has gained some emphasis, though it remains the least emphasized move across all corpora. This trend suggests an evolving academic writing practice, where Australian PhD writers are focusing more on niche establishment and providing clearer articulation of their research contributions, reflecting a diachronic shift in Australian academic writing.

5.3 Move Sequences of the Introduction Chapter in Both Corpora

The three moves identified by Bunton (2002) appear in highly cyclical patterns. However, the results indicate that no single, strictly linear M1–M2–M3 sequence emerges in the analyzed texts. This finding aligns with Bazerman and Prior's (2004) observation that although linear structures are often easier for readers to follow, non-linear structures place greater interpretive responsibility on readers, requiring them to work harder to discern the text's meaning.

Additionally, patterns involving [M1–M3] and [M1–M2] recur most frequently in both corpora. This supports earlier studies by Arulandu (2005), Soler-Monreal et al. (2011), and Kawase (2018), which also note the frequent occurrence of [M1–M3]. Furthermore, both corpora exhibit repeated cycling of Moves 1 and 2 (i.e., $[M1–M2]^n$ followed by M3 or $[M3–M1]^n$). For instance, IC theses 1, 5, 9, 13, and 18 in the NES corpus and IC thesis 5 in the NNES corpus showcase this pattern. According to Swales (1990), such delays can heighten reader uncertainty. Meanwhile, Mauranen (1993) and Paltridge and Starfield (2007) point out that L1 English readers typically prefer the central argument to appear earlier. Both corpora indicate that PhD writers often present multiple reasons for the topic's importance and highlight various gaps in the study, thus cycling repeatedly between Move 1 (background) and Move 2 (gap identification) before introducing the main study (Move 3).

6. Conclusion and Limitations

The purpose of this study was to compare the introduction chapters of 40 PhD theses in Als from Australia (NES) and Malaysia (NNES) countries, using Bunton's (2002) move model. The analysis reveals both shared and contrasting features. Firstly, a new Chapter Summary step appears in both corpora, signalling a stronger commitment to reader guidance than Bunton's original schema anticipated. Secondly, Shared moves differ in frequency and ordering. Australian writers give greatest weight to Occupying the Niche (Move 3), often looping flexibly between Moves 1 and 3. Malaysian writers, by contrast, devote more space to Establishing Territory and Establishing a Niche (Moves 1 and 2) and follow a clearer, step-by-step sequence, an approach that may enhance clarity when writing in L2. Third, non-linear sequencing works when coherence is maintained. The NES corpus shows a lighter, rhetorically nuanced structure, while the NNES corpus illustrates how explicit framing can compensate for linguistic challenges. Pedagogically, recognizing such cross-linguistic variation can help supervisors and novice scholars balance cognitive load, reader expectations, and disciplinary norms.

This study proposes future research. There seem to be a definite need to expand the range of countries, disciplines, educational levels and language background. This would strengthen the insights into diverse academic writing conventions. Another possible area of research is to analyze contemporary and historical PhD theses to track how writing conventions and expectations for PhD theses have evolved in response to shifts in academic practices, advancements in technology, and globalization trends.

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Authors' contributions

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