

# Genre Analysis of Argumentative Essays of Pakistani EFL Learners

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## Abstract

Argumentative essay is an important but difficult genre for non-native learners. There is a dearth of research in Pakistan that describes the nature of argumentative writing from genre-analytical perspective. The current study aimed at finding rhetorical patterns of argumentative essays written by Pakistani college and university students at ICLE (International Corpus of Learner English). A corpus of thirty three argumentative essays has been made. Hyland's model (1990) has been used as the analytical framework to analyze the move-step structure of the essays. In this corpus-based study Ant Mover software as well as human coders have identified and coded the moves. Results have shown that most of the argumentative essays followed the three stages given in the model and they also have obligatory moves set in the model. Findings have revealed that these essays also include some new moves which are not part of the model. The results of this study have pedagogical implications for the teaching and learning of ESP/EFL. It also provides the teachers with better information that can help to improve their teaching approach and materials for academic writing.

**Key words:** argumentative essays, corpus-based, genre analysis, move-step structure

## Introduction

Academic writing is deemed an important genre by the educators, researchers and linguists and its analysis has attracted the attention of scholars. Increasing cross-cultural contacts, interaction of the scholars at international level and the speedy access to information have enhanced this growing interest. Large numbers of non-native speakers are learning English to communicate at international level in written discourse. In these countries the learners at advanced level acquire some proficiency of English, but still they have problems when "writing academic discourse at the level of text organization" (Braine ;1995 ,Benson & Heidish, 1995; Dudley-Evans, 1995; Evensen, 1996, Leech, & Holten, 1995; Swales, 1990, 1996). For global communication non-English writers must now follow the conventional styles of English rhetoric if they are to be accepted and to succeed in publishing in their field of study" (Swales, 1981; Duszak, 1994). Duszak (1997) has presented it in this way, "For speakers of some minority languages English offers a way out of isolation and into the world of international scholarship. Proficiency in academic English becomes a value in itself, a commodity to be acquired through instinctive imitation or guide instructions." (p. 3)

Henry and Roseberry (2001) argue that "The analysis of a genre based on data obtained from a small corpus of texts has become a widely used method of obtaining information about language use" (p. 93) Data for the present study are students' writing pieces of the argumentative essays at ICLE (The International Corpus of Learner English). ICLE is a rich and well documented corpus. It has argumentative essays written by higher intermediate to advanced learners of English from several mother tongue backgrounds, (Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Tswana, Turkish, Pakistan etc.) Granger, Dagneaux and Meunier (2002) have contributed a lot for the availability of the corpus to the academic community. Different universities collaborated internationally for the corpus formation

Genre-based pedagogical methodologies are now becoming popular for teaching/learning the academic writing particularly in English. Still, there is a need to do more research for teaching written discourse in various fields. In Pakistan, academic writing is a neglected area of research, particularly for teaching argumentative writing. So far no research has been done to analyze the move patterns of argumentative essays written by college and university students in Pakistan. Moreover, little attention has been paid to genre analysis with the help of a corpus. To fill this gap, present research has analyzed the move-step structure of the argumentative essays written by Pakistani students

Argumentative essays are integral part of academics in Pakistan, but students are not given detailed and clear instructions about writing argumentative essays. So, they are not aware of the schematic structure of this genre. The main purpose of the study is to investigate the rhetorical patterns of argumentative essays written by Pakistani college students at ICLE (International Corpus of Learner English). In this way the weaknesses of their textual compositions can be located and different proposals can be suggested for their improvement. The information gained about the language use can also be helpful for the teachers. They can use this information in

effectively in EFL/ESL classrooms when teaching students this genre. Moreover, the findings of this research can help to formulate a new argumentative essay framework which could be a suitable model for Pakistani students. A corpus of thirty three essays is formed to answer these research questions:

What are move patterns used by Pakistani students while writing argumentative essays?

What similarities and differences exist between move patterns of Pakistani learners' writings and Hyland' model?

## Literature Review

The concept of genre is important as it has provided a valuable and effective framework to research in various aspects of writing, and its pedagogical applications are employed in different educational fields for teaching and learning purposes. Martin (1984) gives a short but comprehensive definition of genre: "Genre is a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture."(p.25) In the 1990s, genre gained attention of linguists and got special focus in the field of applied linguistics. Swales (1990) provides an explicit definition of genre: "A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes (p. 58) Hyland's (2003) definition of genre goes as "abstract, socially recognized ways of using language for particular purposes." (p. 18)

Genres are flexible and mold themselves according to the communicative needs of a society. In the social setting genre is seen as a set of communicative events. In these sets of events, similar forms and expressions of a language are used, which significantly represent a discourse community. Bhatia (1993) opines that the purpose of genre analysis is not merely the identification of certain moves/steps, the traditional arrangements of these moves or the linguistic features relevant to these moves, but this is important also to know how these features, when combined, fulfill the communicative aim.

Beyond the word and sentence analysis, Swales (1981) introduces the word 'move'. The word 'move' has been explained differently by different linguists. It is a text segment which comprises linguistic features and syntax which give a uniformed expression to that text segment. Bhatia (2001) defines moves as, "rhetorical instruments that realize a subset of specific communicative purposes associated with a genre."(p. 84) Upton and Connor (2001) view moves as "semantic/functional units of texts, which can be identified through their communicative purposes and their typical linguistic boundaries." (p. 317)

Language can be studied either by analyzing its structures or its use. The study of language with the help of corpus is a relatively new concept. Kennedy (1998) defines corpus as "A corpus is a body of written text or transcribed speech which can serve as a basis for linguistic analysis and description."(p. 1) In the corpus-based genres naturally produced or used texts are deemed important for the analysis of language. It pays attention to the language which is actually used by the people in their natural settings instead of the theoretical analysis of the language which does not occur naturally. According to Biber, D. Conrad, S. Reppen, R. (1998) the important features of corpus-based analysis are: "It is empirical, analyzing the actual patterns of use in natural texts; It utilizes a large and principled collection of natural texts, known as a "corpus", as the basis for analysis; It makes extensive use of computers for analysis, using both automatic and interactive techniques; It depends on both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques." (P.4) Biber (1988) did important work in the field of genre analysis. He studied register and genre variations with help of the multi-feature/multidimensional (MF/MD) analytical framework.

Corpus of argumentative essays can be formed for the understanding of various aspects of language and language use. The art of writing argumentative essay is the art of persuasion with responsibility. Connor (1987) provided a broad definition of argumentative writing: "written persuasive discourse integrates the rational and affective appeals and the appeals to credibility." (p.185) According to Connor (1990), the purpose of argumentative writing is to change the point of view of the reader and to make him believe that the writer' standpoint is accurate and reliable. Choi (1988) definition speaks like this: "one kind of writing whose main purpose is to persuade the reader to accept the writer's belief or opinion."(p.17) Crowhurst (1990) takes an argumentative essay as "the kind of writing that the writers take a point of view and support it with either emotional appeals or logical appeals."(p.349) Crowhurst (1991) has noticed some weaknesses in student argumentative writing. First, the organization of the text very is poor. The reason for this problem is that the students lack knowledge of this genre. They are not aware of the schematic structure of argumentative essay and cannot produce appropriate reasons to support their stance. Moreover the students also lack 'stylistic inappropriateness'. The use of language and style is not worthwhile.

In most of the countries of the world including Europe and America "genre-based pedagogy" (Dudley-Evans, 1995; Leki, 1991; Swales, 1981, 1990), is employed for teaching academic writing of English. Yet, there remains a need for further research in the teaching of English language to non-native speakers particularly studies of written academic discourse across "fields, languages and cultures." It is the need of the hour that the teachers should adopt better teaching methods and improved syllabus should be provided for teaching academic writing to the EFL learners in Pakistan. However, in Pakistan corpus-based studies is still a rare researching field and no attention has been paid to genre analysis with the help of corpora. To fill this gap, the researcher has

conducted a genre analysis with the help of a corpus of argumentative essays written by Pakistani college and university students. The present study is an attempt to contribute something to this need. It aims to find out the move structures of argumentative essays written in English by advance learners at ICLE.

## Methodology

### Data & Method of Analysis

Data for the present study are students' writing pieces of the argumentative essays at ICLE (The International Corpus of Learner English). In the ICLE writing conditions are as controlled as possible. The variables of medium, genre, average length, the proficiency level of the students are almost similar, but gender, mother tongue background and essay topics vary from text to text in the corpus. The length of each essay is about 500 to 1000 words. Dictionary use is prohibited but spell check is mandatory. There is no time limit. The corpus used in this study consists of 33 argumentative essays composed by Pakistani college and university students in their second, third or fourth year. Eight topics have been selected out of various topics taken by all the participants. The topics selected for analysis out of the whole corpus are "Are women better parents than men?", "Why marriages fail?", "Money is the root of all evils", "Media is more harmful than useful.", "Death penalty: should it be there or not?", "Co-education", "Are rich happier than poor?", "Is democracy best form of government?"

### Analytical Framework

Different models for analyzing argumentative essays are available but Hyland's argumentative essay analysis model (1990) has been adopted in the present study. Hyland's framework is selected because it is all-inclusive and comprehensive for the analysis of an argumentative essay. It describes each move in detail which can serve as a good model to analyze argumentative essays. Moreover, this model has been used to analyze the texts written by non-English speakers. The data in the present study are also the essays written by non-native speakers. Hyland's (1990) model is presented in the table form below:

**Table 1: Hyland's Model**

Stage	Move
<b>1. Thesis</b> Introduces the proposition to be argued.	<b>(Gambit)</b> Attention Grabber – controversial statement of dramatic illusion. <b>(Information)</b> Presents background material for topic contextualization. <b>Proposition</b> Furnishes a specific statement of position. <b>(Evaluation)</b> Positive gloss – brief support of proposition. <b>(Marker)</b> Introduces and /or identifies a list.
<b>2. Argument</b> Discusses grounds for thesis. (four move argument sequence can be repeated indefinitely)	<b>Marker</b> Signals the introduction of a claim and relates it to the text. <b>(Restatement)</b> Rephrasing or repetition of proposition. <b>Claim</b> States reason for acceptance of the proposition. <b>Support</b> States the grounds which underpin the claim.
<b>3. Conclusion</b> Synthesized discussion and affirms the validity of the thesis.	<b>(Marker)</b> Signals conclusion boundary <b>Consolidation</b> Presents the significance of the argument stage to the proposition. <b>(Affirmation)</b> Restates proposition. <b>(Close)</b> Widens context or perspective of proposition.

### Analysis Procedure

The study attempted to explore rhetorical patterns and move structures of argumentative essays written in English by Pakistani students at ICLE (International Corpus of Learner English) and to find out the weaknesses of their writings so that improvement could be suggested. To investigate the answers to the research questions, data is retrieved from ICLE Corpus available at internet. Thirty three argumentative essays have been selected out of more than three hundred essays written by Pakistani students. Eight topics are selected for analysis and

discussion. In the study, the corpus is categorized and arranged in a coding system for the analysis of moves. The codes for essay identification are used as such available at ICLE.

In the present paper, the move-step structures of the argumentative essays are identified. The moves are first analyzed manually and then Ant mover software is used to identify them. The moves are chosen on the basis of two standards. The moves which are present with high frequency, is the first standard and moves which are central moves according to Hyland (1990) is the second one. In this way, the significant language information about the moves is taken from the analysis of move-step structure. This information is important and crucial in the teaching and learning this specific genre. After the clarity of the moves in different stages, manual move analysis is done. Then data is fed in the Ant mover software for electronic analysis of the moves.

### Results and Discussion

The move pattern used by the students in their argumentative essays is first analyzed manually and then with the help of Ant mover software. The occurrence percentages of various moves in the three stages are then calculated. The results show that most of the argumentative essays follow the pattern of three stages given in the model and they also have obligatory moves set in the model. Findings also reveal some of the optional moves have changed their category. For example although Gambit move in the Thesis stage is optional, its use is rare in the students' texts. Information move in the Thesis stage is used by 100% of the students and seems to be obligatory, while it is optional in Hyland's model. According to the model used, Marker move in the Argument stage is indispensable but students have taken it as optional. Only 36% texts have this move. Similarly, the only obligatory move in the Conclusion stage is Consolidation but only 18% of the students have used it which shows that students take it as an optional move. The idea of presenting new model for Pakistani learners is strengthened because of the category change and the addition of some new moves in the argumentative essays written by Pakistani students.

The data shows that some of the moves are frequently used by the students while some are rarely present in their texts when compared with Hyland 'model. The students almost follow the same pattern of using obligatory and optional moves as is found in the model.

#### Moves Frequently Present

The Information move and Proposition move in the Thesis stage are frequently used by the students in their essays. Moreover, Claim move and Support move in the Argument stage also occurred frequently. The following moves were frequently used by the students in their essays:

**Table 2:** Frequently Used Moves

Stage	Move	Occurrence Percentage
Thesis	Information	100% ( all the 33 essays)
Thesis	Proposition	87.8% (29 out of 33 essays)
Argument	Claim	96.9% (32 out of 33 essays)
Argument	Support	93.9% (31 out of 33 essays)

*Examples:*

(PA-VL-1019) *The best time for a mother is to spend time with her children.*

(PA-SU-1003) *Thus they try to correct their manners of living before the girls.*

(PA-LW-1034) *If death penalty is eradicated, the honour killings will increase very fastly.*

#### Moves Rarely Present

The Gambit move and Marker move in the Thesis stage, Marker move and Restatement move in the Argument stage, Consolidation move and Close move in the Conclusion stage were rarely used by the students in their texts. This deviation indicates the lack of the knowledge of this genre. The logical use of these moves requires better command of written language that is beyond most of the students' skill levels. The following moves were rarely present in the students' texts according to Hyland's model used for the analysis of the argumentative essays:

**Table 3:** Less Frequently Used Moves

Stage	Move	Occurrence Percentage
Thesis	Gambit	6% (2 out of 33 essays)
Thesis	Marker	30% (10 out of 33 essays)
Argument	Marker	36% (12 out of 33 essays)
Argument	Restatement	15% (5 out of 33 essays)
Conclusion	Consolidation	18% (6 out of 33 essays)
Conclusion	Close	18% (6 out of 33 essays)

Essay writing is particularly the most neglected area in the EFL classrooms in Pakistan. The curriculum and the teaching material are not helpful for teaching and learning of this genre. Textbooks mostly have literary material while nonliterary genres are often neglected. The emphasis is put on the grammatical competence in the teaching of languages, but generic competence has always been overlooked. The students face problems mostly due to the lack of input of genre, the lack of knowledge about the structure of argumentative writing, and 'an inability to correctly marshal the resources of content and organization to meet the demands of the argumentative genre' (Hyland, 1990, p. 75).

### New Moves

Hyland's (1990) model has been applied to analyze move patterns and rhetorical structure of the argumentative essays written by the students. The analysis of the texts shows that students also have used certain moves which are not part of Hyland's model. Some of the moves are entirely left out by the students and some new moves have been added in the essays which do not exist in the model. These moves which are not present in the model but are found in the students' texts are given the name New Moves. In all the argumentative essays most of the texts have used different type of new moves. They are discussed under the following headings: **Table 4: Occurrence of New Moves**

New move	Occurrence Percentage
Contradiction	39.3 % (13 out of 33 essays)
Suggestion/Recommendation	51.5% (17 out of 33 essays)

#### Contradiction Move in the Argument stage

The new move of contradiction is used in almost 39% of the students' essays. Thirteen texts were found to contain this new move, called the Contradiction move in the Argument stage. In these essays, the writers originally held one point of view about their respective topics, provided different reasons as claims to support the propositions but after providing some arguments they changed their stance and started giving arguments against their original stance. As the claims are contradictory to the standpoints which the writers originally held, the new move is named the Contradiction move. The proposition stated the potential disadvantages of media in 'Media is more harmful than useful', some arguments supported the proposition but some more arguments are brought forward to highlight the advantages of media. In another similar case, the writers of PA-SU-1003 (Co-education) and PA-VL-1027 (Co-education) strongly disagree with the co-education system in Pakistan, while they also pointed out the advantages of this system in Pakistan. There may be various reasons for induction of this new move. The reason according to the researcher is that the students in schools, colleges and universities lack appropriate knowledge and guidance of the genre, particularly writing argumentative essays. The reading material and reference books available to the students also lack appropriate knowledge of this genre. Most of the teachers discuss both the aspects of any controversial issue and expect the same from them in tests or exams. The instructions in the classroom, the reading material and the guide books encourage the students to discuss and write about the advantages and disadvantages of any issue under discussion.

#### Suggestion/Recommendation Move

Some students have provided suggestions or recommendations for the Government or the people. Such statements are not the part of Hyland's model (1990). They are named the "Suggestion/Recommendation move". The Suggestion move aims to help people at public or private level by providing proposals or recommendations. There are 17 texts that presented this move. The student in PA-GF-1063 has given different suggestions to government to promote co-education in Pakistan. The writer of "Money is the root of all evils." (PA-VL-1021) has developed the proposition that money is the root of all evils and most of the time he has been suggesting to adopt Islamic life style to avoid evils, "Islam teaches us to lead a moderate life," Being Muslims we should not hoard money." There may be different reasons for the presence of this new move. One of the reasons is that the students have better understanding of the issues, and they have deep insights into the problems, so, they are likely to provide proposals and recommendations. Teachers' instructions and classroom discussion also play a role in the frequent use of this move.

### Conclusion

The major concern of this study was primarily to investigate the move-step structure of argumentative essays written in English by Pakistani students on current issues. Another purpose was to identify the weaknesses of the students so that improvements could be suggested. Moreover, by exploring rhetorical patterns it also aimed at finding out information about the use of language by the students which could help the teachers to adapt in different ways when teaching this genre to the students. To achieve these objectives of the study, genre analysis was conducted manually and by using ant-mover software as well. In general, most of the argumentative essays written by Pakistani students contain three stages: *the Thesis stage, the Argument stage and the Conclusion stage*. All the argumentative essays composed by the students include all the three stages in Hyland's model

(1990). However, two new type of moves were identified, which do not exist in Hyland's model (1990) i.e. Contradiction and Suggestion/Recommendation. The presence of the first new move in students' essays showed the inconsistency with or irrelevance to the Proposition. Therefore, the students should avoid this new move in their written work. But as far as the other new move of Suggestion/Recommendation is concerned, it strengthens the idea of a new model for Pakistani learners, and can be included in this genre as a move.

This study has significant pedagogical implications for the teachers, the learners and the materials developers both in theoretical and practical aspects. It can provide better guideline to the teachers in Pakistan. Instead of getting vague ideas and impression of students' compositions; teachers can have better understanding of the work and can intervene effectively in writing weaknesses. Moreover, teacher can provide explicit criteria for assessment and feedback, which is a way of integrating teaching and assessment so that improvement of writing can be suggested based on explicit understanding of text requirement (Hyland, 2007). The results give strength to pedagogical claims about the significance of genre-resources for the teaching/learning process in the classroom. The study also opens new arenas for the researchers. For the researchers it may prove a lead and the prospective researchers can design their studies on this pattern and can explore more aspects of this genre. Future studies with more learners, diverse topics and with larger corpus would further benefit the teachers, the researchers and, ultimately the writers.

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