An Analysis of the English Language Tenses Used
in Educational Research Abstracts

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Abstract

This research aims to study the use of tenses in different moves of the educational research abstracts. A sample of 108 research abstracts was used. The tenses were studied and classified in each move of the abstracts. The results show that there are 3 tenses mostly used in writing research abstracts; present simple, present perfect and past simple. Past simple tense was mostly used in the abstracts and in move 3 that describes the research methodology to discuss the what, why, and how the research was done. This tense was also used in move 4 to show the research findings and to report information about issues and ideas that were dealt with before writing the actual research. The present simple tense was mostly used in move 5 for the conclusion and discussion and also in move 1 for the introduction of the research concerning general truths, general knowledge and the other research works in the order of the chronology of the study reported. The present simple tense was also employed when discussing information derived from different document sources. The present perfect tense was rarely used in the abstract but sometimes it was used in move 1 and move 5 to indicate narrative progression or to mention the prior researches that had just been done.

Keywords : Tenses, Analysis, Educational Abstract

Introduction

In some languages, tenses are not very important or do not even exist, but in English, the concept of tense is very important. Tense is a method that we use in English to refer to timefipast, present and future. Many languages use tenses to talk about time. Some other languages have no tenses, but of course they still refer to time, using different methods. All the tenses have function to indicate when the actions take place and are mainly indicated by verbs. In the English language we have learned that simple present tense is used to state permanent situations, facts, routines, feeling, opinions and timetable. Simple past tense is used to

indicate finished actions. Future simple is used to indicate future plans and arrangements, intentions, instant decisions, future facts and predictions. Present progressive is used to indicate action happening now and also future plans and arrangements. Present perfect is used to indicate recent events, giving news, live experience, unfinished actions. We see that different situations use different tenses with regard to their functions. With regards to this study, research abstract is one of the situations that tenses will take a role in writing because research abstracts are usually presented in English and they are the threshold for the reader to get through the research quickly. As Swale's work (1990) he indicates that each research abstract has five different moves and each move has different purposes to state the ideas or the result of the research. Consequently, the abstract needs both time and tense in different moves. Then, the purpose of this study aims to analyze the tenses used in the different moves in abstracts with regard to their frequency and functions. The result of the study will be beneficial for one who may needs a guide to use the tenses in different moves of abstracts.

Theoretical backgrounds

What is a move?

Move is a technical term in discourse analysis used for describing the individual parts of an exchange in conversational analysis. Skelton (1994) believes that a move is determined by establishing the rhetorical function of a given text and ascertaining whether there are specific linguistic forms or exponents which indicate that function. A move is a defining feature of a particular genre. The moves represent the main themes of the text and aid the reader in selecting and understanding the different meaning units contained in. Dudley-Evans (1994) defines moves in his analysis by using discourse markers. The researcher defines a move as a manifestation by the writer to move away from one aspect of the text to introduce another. Many linguists, for example, Cross and Oppenheim (2005), Nwogu (1997), Santos (1996), Gibson (1993) and Swale (1990) have examined a large number of published abstracts and they indicates that the typical moves in an abstract are; MOVE 1: situating the research, MOVE 2: presenting the research, MOVE 3: describing the methodology, MOVE 4: summarizing the results and MOVE 5: discussing the results and probably giving recommendations. In each move there are sub-moves as well.

The pattern of moves can occur cyclically in that one or more moves can re-occur in a text in a pattern. This happening is called move cycles, as proposed by Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988). It contains categories that 'arise from the text' and that describe the ùtransactional, interactional and logical functions of language in such a way as to reflect the writer's constantly shifting 'foregrounding' of these different aspects.

What is a tense?

Tense is the form of a verb that shows us when the action or state happens (past, present or future) but note that the name of a tense is not always a guide to tell when the action happens. The "present continuous tense", for example, can be used to talk about the present or the future. Tense is a grammatical category, typically marked on the verb, that deictically refers to the time of the event or state denoted by the verb in relation to some other temporal reference point. (Glossary of Linguistic Terms, 2008).

As mentioned in the introduction section, each tense shows different functions in use depending upon the purpose of the writer and the situations. Thus, in using tense the problem comes in what the various verbs forms mean. There is a great confusion because many people associate tense with time. They have the idea that verb tenses are always associated with particular times. In fact they are not. The present simple tense is not always about the present and the past tense is not always about the past (Terry L.F., 1997).

Scope and Limitations :

This study was an attempt to analyze English tenses used in every move of the abstracts. The analysis was to examine the tenses used by looking at only in the main sentences, defined by the main verbs. Only 108 abstracts out of a thousand were studied, therefore, the results of this studied are exploratory. The results were the outcome of quantitative together with qualitative research methods and may be generalized to educational study, but do not intend to generalize to the other fields of study.

Methodology

How to sample :

The researchers selected the abstracts for analysis using simple random sampling method. The researchers decided that the abstracts selected were only in the educational field of study written between 1997 and 2007. They were from online-database and in opened-publication in college and university journals in North America and Canada. There were 108 educational abstracts were selected for this study and they were the abstracts of the research articles originally written in English that belonged to the variety of authors who were Master and Ph.D. students.

How to analyze :

The researchers used the very simple way to analyze the data; reading through every sentence of the abstract and tallying to get the frequency of tenses used in all the abstracts. Then, the percentage was employed as statistical instrument.

Results

Tenses analysis

With regard to the quantitative data obtained, the frequency and percentage were employed for data analysis in each move as follows;

Move 1 is like an introduction of an abstract. It describes the backgrounds of the problem and its necessities to conduct the research. In this move it was found that there were three tenses which were used as shown in the table below.

Table 1 Tenses used in move 1

Tense	Frequency	Percentage
Present Simple Tense	168	68.30
Present Perfect Tense	19	7.72
Past Simple Tense	59	23.98
Total	246	100

From Table 1 it reveals that present simple tense was used the most in Move 1 (68.30%) and then past simple tense (23.98%). Present perfect tense was the least found in Move 1 (7.72%).

Move 2 is to describe the scope of the research. The writers identify the research objectives in this move and may inform the problems of the research which the writer wants to solve. The tenses found in this move are shown in the table below.

Table 2 Tenses used in move 2

Tense	Frequency	Percentage
Present Simple Tense	75	43.86
Present Perfect Tense	9	5.26
Past Simple Tense	87	50.88
Total	171	100

From Table 2 it showed that past simple tense was used the most in Move 2 (50.88%) and then present simple tense (43.86%). Present perfect tense was the least found in Move 2 (5.26%).

Move 3 is to describe the research methodology that means how the research was done. The research tools, research methods, the samples used and data analysis are informed in this move. The tenses used in this move were shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Tenses used in move 3

Tense	Frequency	Percentage
Present Simple Tense	43	14.48
Present Perfect Tense	10	3.37
Past Simple Tense	244	82.15
Total	297	100

From Table 3 it indicates that past simple tense was used most in Move 3 (82.15%) and then present simple tense (14.48%). Present perfect tense was the least found in Move 3 (3.37%).

Move 4 is to present the results of research. It also identifies what the writers learned, invented or created. The tenses found in this move are shown in the table below.

Table 4 Tenses used in move 4

Tense	Frequency	Percentage
Present Simple Tense	12	5.94
Present Perfect Tense	0	0
Past Simple Tense	190	94.06
Total	202	100

From the table 4 it indicates that past simple tense was used the most in Move 4 (94.06%) and then present simple tense (5.94%) and Present perfect tense was not found in this Move.

Move 5 is the last part of abstracts. It gives conclusions of the research and also the recommendation for implementing the results and for further studies. The tenses found in this move are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Tenses used in move 5

Tense	Frequency	Percentage
Present Simple Tense	187	71.92
Present Perfect Tense	12	4.62
Past Simple Tense	61	23.46
Total	260	100

From Table 5 it revealed that present simple tense was used the most in Move 5 (71.92%) and then past simple tense (23.46%). Present perfect tense was the least found in Move 5 (4.62%).

From Table 1-5 it indicated that there were three tenses used in each move of educational abstract writing, Present Simple Tense, Present Perfect Tense and Past Simple Tense. The Past Simple Tense was used the most (54.51%) particularly in Move 3 (38.07%), describing research methodology. Then, Present Simple Tense (41.24%) that was used most in Move 5 (38.56%), research discussion and recommendation, and Present Perfect Tense was the least used (4.25%). It also showed that the three tenses were used in every move in writing abstracts, except in Move 4 which showed that no present perfect tense was used.

Discussion

The tense analysis presented here focused on the frequency of tenses used in each move of the abstracts, more precisely, on the functions of situations in each move.

Move 1

Move 1: situating the research, it was found that present tense was used in the second order (34.64%) less than in Move 5 (38.56%). It is because this move discusses the general information derived from document sources. The function of this move is to present the background of the research that needs to present the real and present situations and the reasons why it needs to be investigated. It also states current knowledge and problems in the existing research. The writer has to write and present the idea in his own words that requires the use of present simple tense.

Example 1;

This study investigates the dynamics of importing an innovative educational program across a cultural boundary. It is a case study of a particular Montessori School in Thailand that has practiced Montessori education for over sixteen years. The research's aim is to explore the process of adoption and adaptation as the program evolved, and to examine the cultural and social factors in Thailand that may be related to the adaptations.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3044060)

Example 2;

Motivational research has established that student performance is effected by a number of factors, including beliefs such as task values, task choice, and commitment.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3103947)

There have been few studies of communication in school-based problem solving models involving multiple consultees.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3118859)

From the example 2, the present perfect was also used in this move to show the progress of some situations that were mentioned as the background of the study. The researchers look back from one time to an event which happened at an earlier time.

Example 3;

The images of private vocational education in Thailand were studied by analyzing the image-making moments among former private vocational students.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3087872)

However, past tense also appeared in this move because the events that already happened in the related research were mentioned in this move.

Move 2

Move 2: presenting the research, the function of this section is to indicate the main features, main purpose and/or to raise a hypothesis. The findings revealed that the past simple tense was used in the third order (13.57%) from Move 3 (38.07%) and Move 4 (29.64%). This finding was congruent with the studies of some linguists, Santos (1996), Gibson (1993) and Swale (1990), which stated that when the writers raise a hypothesis (such as outlining their questions or hypotheses), they often use past tense.

Example 1;

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ability of Thai freshmen university students to use multiple standards of comprehension evaluation to evaluate their understanding during the reading of expository texts in English.

(From abstract Pub.No. 9961107)

The problem of this descriptive study was to examine and report the current status of ethics education in an educational leadership preparation program, as well as the need for ethics education in an educational leadership preparation program.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3260143)

Example 2;

The purpose of this study is to investigate Taiwanese in-service preschool teachers' personal attitudes toward music teaching, and their concepts of the competencies necessary for music teaching.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3260143)

This dissertation identifies and analyzes the factors which negatively and positively nfluence teacher leaders' decisions to pursue careers in educational administration. The study provides data for understanding and addressing the perceived administrative shortage, especially in Wisconsin. Attracting leaders to educational administrative roles is a critical component ensuring excellent schools for all learners.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3234877)

This proposed qualitative study is a grounded theory inquiry of the experiences of African American female school principals. The intent of this study is to generate a substantive theory of educational leadership grounded in the experiences of African American female school principals. Four questions guide this inquiry: (1) What is the rationale for studying the experiences of African American female school principals? (2) What procedures are used to generate a substantive grounded theory inquiry? (3) What is my portrayal of the experiences of the African American female school principals? (4) What are the implications of the substantive grounded theory inquiry for school leadership practice?

(From abstract Pub.No. 3139665)

From the example 2, the researchers found that some of research abstracts used present simple tense in Move 2. Thus, the questions may arise which tense would be appropriate to use in presenting the purposes of the study. This question may be answered by Micheal Lewis (1997) who stated that the use of tense involved how we perceive an event. If we consider an event to be 'a single', 'total entity', 'a matter of fact' and 'immediate, rather than remote', then we use the present simple. Thus, when researchers considered an event to be remote relationship, they will use past simple tense.

Move 3

Move 3: describing the methodology, the function of this move is to describe how the research was done. The finding indicates that the past simple tense was mostly used in this move (38.07%). The fact is that it describes the research actions that were already finished in the specific time in the past and the passive form was also used mostly because it describe the process that has to be done.

Example 1;

A quantitative survey was sent to female principals and assistant principals in three school divisions located in Northern Virginia to gather demographic and narrative information. Of the 334 women surveyed, 140 (42%) returned the survey. The results of the survey revealed the average female assistant principal or principal to be at least 46 years of age, white, married with two children, and a master's degree holder.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3199635)

The research design also incorporated three qualitative focus groupsand six interviews.The qualitative portion of the study explored career paths leadership challenges, barriers that prevented or impeded women from advancement, and the benefits of entoring and networking opportunities.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3199635)

Example 2;

The sample for this study includes 349 Wisconsin teacher leaders identified by their school principals. Participants responded to a questionnaire survey on 42 negative barriers and 42 positive practices, programs, and policies which may influence a decision to pursue a career in administration. Demographic data was also collected to determine the variables associated with decisions to pursue careers in educational administration. Gender and age variables are explored.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3234877)

From the example 2 the researchers found that the present simple tense may appear in this move. It may be because the abstract writer thinks that it is an immediate action.

Move 4

Move 4: summarizing the results, the function of this move is to report the findings. The result also shows that the past simple tense was used at the second order (29.64%) in this move because an event has already happened in the past. It may generalize that presenting the research results should always be used past simple tense. In this move there is also a tendency towards using passive voices, the verbs that often found in this move were "was found, was observed or was shown". However, an active voice with subjects such as findings, data, is quite common. The tendency seems to be for the researcher to take a less conspicuous place and to allow the data to speak for itself.

Example 1;

Findings indicate that external influences and pressures present the greatest barrier to pursuing careers in educational administration. Teacher leaders cited declining resources, increased litigation, cost of tuition, school district bureaucracy, and school bashing as the top individual barriers. Salary and benefits and professional issues were the lowest rated barriers.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3234877)

The results showed the goal to be the most significant factor in predicting those pursuing and holding the position of superintendent in the state of Kansas. Those who had the goal of being a superintendent when they started their educational administration doctoral program were more likely to hold or pursue the superin-

tendency. Gender and mastery were also found to be significant factors in predicting those holding a superintendency in Kansas.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3185191)

Example 2;

The findings of this study revealed that superintendents in the state of Illinois perceived a higher degree of importance for some of the Illinois superintendent leadership content area standards as opposed to others when asked to compare them. Also, this study found that Illinois superintendents perceived the Illinois superintendent leadership content area standards knowledge indicators to be either very important or somewhat important most of the time. Furthermore, it was found that certain relationships existed between personal and/or district demographic variables and the perceptions of Illinois superintendents concerning the degree of importance of the Illinois leadership content area standards and knowledge indicators.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3161306)

The research suggests that school leadership discourse is informed by personal backgrounds in struggle, perseverance and work ethic. Political organization and advocacy is identified as an essential element of school leaders' responsibilities, however, concepts of race and racism are defined narrowly and deemed ineffective in the political discourse. Although the educational leaders view school finance as unfair, inequitable, and insufficient, they deny the institutional role that racism plays. Whereas they negate the racial hierarchy instituted by the school finance system, they practice a racial, coalitional process of political participation and organization.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3128863)

From the examples 1 and 2 the researchers found that some abstract writers used both the Present Simple Tense and the Past Simple Tense to present the findings of the research. Therefore, it is concluded that the two tenses, Present Simple and Past Simple Tense can be used in this Move.

Move 5

Move 5: discussing the result, the function of this move is to draw conclusion and give recommendation. It was found that the present simple tense was mostly used (38.56%) in this move. It may be because this move is to present the researcher's findings. It is the immediate idea so the researcher chooses to present by using present simple tense to make his opinions alive. Some of the sentences using past simple tense appear here when the researcher mentioned about the result of the research. Therefore, we may say that discussion and recommendations with present relevance are often reported in the present tense.

Example;

The findings of this study reinforce the original critique of the literature. Professional values, far from being uniquely subjective or emerging from individuals themselves, have clear—though certainly complex—socio-cultural origins. This suggests that far both theory and practice increased attention needs be paid not only to administrative understandings per se, but to the sources of these understandings, the ways in which they become known, and the ways in which they are constructed. Most of all, an emphasis on the socio-cultural nature of administrative knowledge behooves a heightened sense of epistemological humility with regard to administrative phenomena. In as much as professional knowledge appears to be a function of social interaction, it is necessarily impermanent, incomplete, and perpetually changing. The epistemological ramification of this is that 'good' administration—the 'right' professional values—are not ontologically real, but rather a singular, temporary, socially moderated phenomenon. To this end, I argue that school leadership needs to transcend any prescriptive account of what allegedly should constitute effective administration, rather providing for the intellectual facility of educational administrators to recognize and effectuate 'good' school leadership.

(From abstract Pub.No. NR02655)

Researchers have linked principal behaviors to effects on school climates, which in turn have been shown to indirectly affect student achievement (Bredeson, 1989; Halpin & Croft, 1963). Leithwood (1994) linked principals' transformational leadership to measures of improvement in teachers' classroom behaviors, attitudes, and effectiveness (i.e., student achievement). The findings of this study should be utilized to assist principals to ensure that they demonstrate the leadership behaviors perceived necessary by classroom teachers. Doing so will assist teachers in becoming more effective classroom teachers.

(From abstract Pub.No. 3050343)

In conclusion, present simple and past simple tenses were mostly used in writing academic abstracts and their use involves with both their functions and the researchers' feelings about their work. If the researcher wants to make an event alive or it is an immediate idea or event, the present tense will be used. Plotnik (2003) discusses the effect of tense that every narrative has a base tense; one that moves the action of the communication forward. The use of the tense establishes the mood for the conversation or the story being toldfipast tense is traditionally the storyteller's medium, in which events have taken place and people have acted out their destinies. There is a finite basis to expired time. Present tense, on the other hand, promotes a feeling or mood of immediacy and the potential for change or flexibility. Understanding and correctly using the past and present tense has the potential of significantly increasing not only effective communication of verbal and written

messages, but also of correctly and proactively establishing relational aspects of events and situations that is an important part of proactive grammar instruction.

Suggested Abstract Model

From the findings, it was found that the abstract writers used mostly the combination of 2 tenses, present simple and past simple tenses. Therefore, the researchers have created a model for writing an educational abstract in English which may be useful for novice abstract writers or the ones who would like to know English tenses used in abstracts writing or for those researchers who would like to further investigate about English tenses used in abstract writing. Although, it is not an absolute model for writing an abstract in English, it can be used as a guideline for writing abstracts in English.

Abstract

The purposes of this research were/are; 1)..., 2)..
and 3).. The samples used in this research were/are..

The research tool/instruments used were/are; 1.., 2)..
and 3).. The procedure / composed of / composes of / consisted of / consists
of; 1)..., 2)..., 3)... and
4).. Statistics used to analyze the data obtained were/are..

The results/findings were; 1)...................................., 2...................................., 3)....................................,
and 4)..

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