

A Study on Usage of Verb Tense in Abstract Writing

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Abstract

It is said that abstract writing is one of the most important parts of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). By reading abstracts, readers can judge the quality of papers and avoid wasting precious time reading irrelevant parts. Against its importance, however, recommended ways of abstract writing may vary between researchers and teachers of EAP. Especially, the usage of verb tense is controversial. Some show that both the present tense and the past tense can be used in abstract writing depending on the objectives of the sentences. Others assert that only the past tense can be used in abstract writing. Furthermore, it is also said that the usage of verb tense may depend on the research field or may just be a matter of preference. The author has analysed the abstracts distributed to the participants of the 14th and 15th International Pragmatics Conference and revealed some traits of the corpus. To complement these, the aim of the present study is to clarify the tendencies of the tense usage in the same corpus. Further, the author randomly extracted 60 abstracts from the corpus and analysed them by utilising the five-move analysis and looking at the distribution of the present simple, the present perfect and the past simple in each move. In the study, a sentence was regarded as one unit and counting the numbers of the main verbs in the sentences yielded the distribution of verb tense in the corpus. The duration of the study was about two months. Contrary to the instructions of the writing textbooks and previous studies, the corpus contained numerous present verbs, which were used according to various objectives, such as emphasising achieved works and convincing the conclusions. The findings of this study can also give some implications to EAP.

Keywords: Abstract, Abstract Writing, EAP, Genre Analysis, Verb Tense

Introduction

It is widely believed that abstracts are one of the most important parts of academic papers (Day & Gastel, 2012; Hartley & Benjamin, 1998; Santos, 1996; Shahla, 2015; Swales & Feak, 2009, 2012; Talebzadeh, Samar, Kiany, & Akbari, 2013; Tseng, 2011); thus, abstracts can be utilised as a barometer to judge the quality of an

A STUDY ON USAGE OF VERB TENSE IN ABSTRACT WRITING

academic paper (Hartley & Benjamin, 1998; Swales & Feak, 2009). In addition, by reading abstracts and evaluating the relevance to their specific fields, readers will be able to understand the outline of a paper easily and save their precious time (Cross & Oppenheim, 2006; Hartley, Sydes, & Blurton, 1996). However, it is also pointed out that studies on abstracts and abstract writing are not plentiful (Santos, 1996; Shahla, 2015; Swales, 1990; Talebzadeh et al., 2013). Therefore, to conduct research on abstracts and abstract writing is one of the most meaningful pieces of research in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

The author has investigated the characteristics of the abstracts that have appeared in the collection of abstracts submitted to the conferences of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA), in which a quantity of studies on arts, humanities, sociology and education are presented and shown some traits of the corpus, such as the structure of the abstracts, the distribution of *moves* (to be explained), and the differences between the abstracts written by Japanese-speaking writers and those written by English-speaking writers. However, the results yielded in the investigation had some tendencies that were not in line with the previous studies on abstracts. That is, though some studies on abstracts and abstract writing textbooks have encouraged writers to use only the past tense in abstract writing, the results of the investigation showed that the present tense can be used in abstract writing as well. This result coincides with other studies on abstracts in research papers (e.g. Orasan, 2001), meaning the usage of verb tense in abstracts can be very controversial. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse the corpus in terms of the usage of verb tense and to find out some features of the abstracts in this specific academic field, which may give some implications to EAP. In addition to this, this study will also analyse the average length of abstracts, which also fluctuates among the studies on abstracts and academic fields, showing an ideal length of the abstracts in the academic field. Accordingly, the research questions of this study are as follows.

- (1) What verb tense is preferred and how is it used in the academic fields of arts, humanities, sociology and education?
- (2) What is the average length of the abstracts submitted to the IPrA conferences and what does it mean?

By answering these research questions, the present study tries to reveal a preferred usage of verb tense in the abstracts written as conference contributions and a suitable length of an abstract in the academic fields of arts and humanities. In other words, the findings can be a model of abstract writing in the academic field and contribute to improvement of abstracts written by novice writers in the academic fields.

Literature Review

Abstracts have been analysed as one of the studies on genre analysis (Hyon, 1996; Swales, 1990). Swales (1990) is among the first studies on abstracts and has pointed out that research on abstracts is ‘a neglected field’ (p. 181). It is also evident that research on abstracts is not abundant (Santos, 1996; Shahla, 2015; Swales, 1990; Talebzadeh et al., 2013). However, due to the explosive increase in the numbers of academic papers and competition (Cross & Oppenheim, 2006; Swales & Feak, 2012), analysis on abstracts and the improvement of abstract writing cannot be ignored because abstracts are essential to judging the quality of a paper at a glance. Readers can also avoid reading large quantities of irrelevant information by reading abstracts as a threshold of research (Hartley & Benjamin, 1998). Furthermore, abstract writing has been regarded as an important part of EAP (Bloor, 1984; Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 2009, 2012). Swales (1990) points out that an abstract written in English seems to be compulsory even in papers and dissertations written in other languages. Therefore, research on abstracts and abstract writing are becoming more and more important.

Following this trend, the author has also conducted research on abstracts submitted to IPrA conferences by utilising a five-move analysis (Santos, 1996; Swales & Feak, 2012). In the move analysis, abstracts were analysed by dividing them into components called *move*, which has a particular role in an abstract. Swales and Feak (2009) explain that ‘a move is a stretch of text that does a particular job’ and ‘can vary in length from a phrase to a paragraph’ (p. 5). Santos (1996) also describes a move as ‘a genre stage which has a particular, minor communicative purpose to fulfill’ (p. 485). The five-move analysis consists of the five moves, namely, *Background*, *Aim*, *Method*, *Results*, and *Conclusion*. The details of the five-move analysis are attached as Appendix A. Fujiwara (in press) has revealed the preferred structures of the abstracts, the distribution of moves, the opening and closing moves in the corpus, and so forth. In the investigation, one of the most interesting findings was that some of the writers had adopted not only the past tense but also the present tense, which contradicted some previous studies on abstract writing. This appears to correspond with the remark on tense usage by Swales & Feak (2012). According to them, the ‘tense usage in abstracts is fairly complicated’ (p. 386). The observation above led the author to analyse the usage of verb tense in the corpus closely. In addition, the length of abstracts, which fluctuates among studies, does matter. According to Letchford, Preis, and Moat (2016), for example, the shorter an abstract is, the more attention it receives. Therefore, an investigation on the length of abstracts must be helpful. In the following sections, some studies on the usage of the verb tense

and the length in abstract writing are presented.

The Usage of Verb Tense in Abstracts

As mentioned above, there seems to be two patterns of mentioning the usage of verb tense in abstract writing in previous studies and textbooks. Some studies insist that writers must use either the present tense or the past tense in abstract writing. Others suggest using the right tense at the right time according to the objectives of the sentences.

Abstract Writing in Textbooks. Day et al. (2012) assert that ‘most or all of the abstract should be written in the past tense’ (p. 54). According to Day et al. (2012), this is because an abstract must refer to the work that was done in the past. Moreover, other research also insists that writers should use the past tense in abstract writing (Evans, Gruba, & Zobel, 2014; Tsuda & Moore, 2003). In addition, some textbooks for university students encourage students to use the past tense. For instance, The University Melbourne explains that students should use the past tense because abstracts refer to unpublished results (The University Melbourne, n.d.). Contrary to these, McCaskill (1998) insists that the present tense should be used in abstracts, presenting no reason or explanation.

On the other hand, Wallwork (2011) advises writers to suit their words to the occasion, claiming that ‘the most commonly used tenses in abstracts are the present simple (*we show*) and the past simple (*we showed*)’ (p. 186). He explains that the present simple may be used to make abstracts ‘sound more dynamic’ and ‘conclusions more convincing,’ and to ‘talk about a well-known situation’ and ‘explain their opinion on this well-known situation’ (p. 187). Besides this, he also insists that the present perfect and the present perfect continuous may be used when an author describes ‘a situation that began in the past and is still true now’ (p. 187). In addition, the past simple, Wallwork (2011) explains, may be used to describe what authors ‘did / achieved and what conclusions they reached’ (p. 187).

Swales & Feak (2012) also recommend that writers use both the present tense and the past tense. They point out that writers should choose verb tenses as a matter of strategy and by using the present tense, writers can ‘produce an effect of liveliness and contemporary relevance’ (p. 387). Swales & Feak also state that ‘the shift to the present tense is more likely to occur in the physical science, such as Physics, Chemistry, and Astrophysics, and less likely to occur in the social sciences’ (p. 387).

Studies on Abstracts in Research Papers. Studies of abstracts in research papers have been conducted by some researchers and interesting points have been shown in the research, which differ partly from the instructions in the textbooks mentioned above. Table 1 shows preferred tense usage in the abstracts in various academic fields, from Artificial Intelligence to Anthropology. All the studies report that only the past tense is

A STUDY ON USAGE OF VERB TENSE IN ABSTRACT WRITING

used in the Method move and this is because the Method move should consist of an explanation about the actual method the researchers used in their experiments in the past. The same tendency can be seen in the Results move, where the authors present the actual results they obtained in the experiments. However, as Santos (1996) points out, sometimes authors choose the present tense to make the results look more indisputable and established. This point seems to sympathise with Swales and Feak's (2012) remark, that "there appears to be considerable disciplinary and individual tense variation with sentences dealing with results" (p. 386). The studies also point out that, in the Background move, the present and the present perfect can be used to list general ideas and established knowledge in specific academic fields (Orasan, 2001; Santos, 1996). In addition, the present perfect can be used to refer to gaps between the previous studies and researchers' own analysis, or to emphasise the weaknesses of previous studies (Orasan, 2001; Salager-Meyer, 1992). In the Aim move, the usage of the tense depends on the inquiry types of the paper (Saeew et al., 2014; Santos, 1996). According to Saeew et al. (2014), if the inquiry type is "article" or "paper," the present tense may be used and if the inquiry type is "study" or "research," the past tense tends to be used. This is because using the present tense can 'yield the sense of immediate physical objects in front of the readers,' whereas using the past tense can 'represent the entire work already accomplished' (Saeew et al., 2014, p. 85). Santos (1996) also points out that if hypotheses or assumptions are made in the Aim move, the past tense is preferred because the present tense is tinged with indication of generalised knowledge, which may be difficult to harmonise with hypotheses or assumptions. Regarding the Conclusion move, it is indicated that the present tense may be preferred to make the conclusion strong and clear (Wallwork, 2011). It is also important to note that the preferred tense in moves is reported to vary according to disciplines.

Table 1

Preferred tense usage reported in previous studies in research papers

Authors	Moves	Back-ground	Aim	Method	Results	Conclusion
Salager-Meyer (1992)		Present	Past	Past	Present	Present
Santos (1996)		Present	Present / Past	Past	Past	NR
Orasan (2001)		Present / Present perfect	Present	Past	Present	NR

A STUDY ON USAGE OF VERB TENSE IN ABSTRACT WRITING

Authors	Moves	Back-ground	Aim	Method	Results	Conclusion
Tseng (2011)		Present / Present perfect	Present	Past	Past	Present
Saeew & Tangkiengsirisin (2014)		Present / Present perfect	Present / Past	Past	Past	Present

NR=Not reported

This section has reviewed some studies and textbooks on abstract writing. One significant thing that has been discovered here is that there is no concrete rule about the usage of verb tense in abstracts. Therefore, the assertions that writers should use either the present tense or the past tense in Day et al. (2012), Evans et al. (2014), McCaskill (1998), and Tsuda et al. (2003) may be too rigid, while it may be true that some points in Wallwork (2011), Swales and Feak (2012), and other studies on abstracts in research papers may be reasonable guidelines for tense usage in abstract writing.

The Average Length of the Abstracts

The second research question of this study is about the length of the abstracts in the corpus. Some studies and textbooks have mentioned an ideal length of abstracts. For example, Orasan (2001) conducted research on abstract length and listed the average lengths in some academic fields. Tseng (2011) also presents the average length of the abstracts in the field of Applied Linguistics. Table 2 shows the average lengths of abstracts by Orasan (2001) and Tseng (2011). As such, it is indicated that the average length of all the fields is 182.86 words. One interesting feature is that the average length of abstracts in the fields of science, such as Computer Science, Biology, and Chemistry, tend to be longer than those of Linguistics, Anthropology, and Applied Linguistics, which belong to the realm of arts and humanities.

A STUDY ON USAGE OF VERB TENSE IN ABSTRACT WRITING

Table 2

The length of abstracts in some academic fields, adopted from Orasan (2001) and Tseng (2011)

Field	Average length (words)
Artificial Intelligence	165.67
Computer Science	232
Biology	196.18
Linguistics	149.52
Chemistry	215.08
Anthropology	157.88
Applied Linguistics	163.68
Average	182.86

Furthermore, Table 3 shows the figures of the recommended lengths of abstracts in some textbooks. The average is 293 words, which is relatively longer than what is shown in Table 2. This may be because the required limitations in academic journals, which can demand papers to be sophisticated and structured in terms of the style, may be stricter than those in textbooks, which are normally written for novice writers, such as students.

Table 3

The recommended lengths of abstracts in textbooks

Author(s)	Proposed length (words)
Day et al. (2012)	250
Hartley (2008)	150
McCaskill (1998)	200
Swales & Feak (2009)	500 (or more)
Wallwork (2011)	(up to) 500
Average	293

As mentioned above, the length of abstracts fluctuates according to the academic fields and instructions in textbooks. In research paper abstracts, as Letchford et al. (2016) point out, the abstracts tend to be shorter to attract the attention of readers. However, in this study, the average length of the corpus was predicted to be longer than research paper abstracts because conference abstracts should contain more information to promote the work (Swales & Feak, 2009).

Methodology

As mentioned in the literature review section, there seems to be no clear rules about the usage of verb tenses in abstract writing. Therefore, to know the details of the corpus, the 60 abstracts submitted to the IPrA conferences were randomly

A STUDY ON USAGE OF VERB TENSE IN ABSTRACT WRITING

extracted and analysed in terms of the usage of verb tense. Firstly, the structure of the abstracts was analysed by utilising the five-move analysis. Following this, verbs in each move were manually counted, yielding the numbers of sentences containing the verbs of the present, the present perfect, and the past. It should be noted that in the current analysis, the aspects (progressive and passive) and auxiliary verbs were included in each tense. In addition, the verb tense frequencies were calculated. As well, the total numbers and averages of words and sentences were also counted and calculated. Furthermore, following Saeew et al. (2014) and Santos (1996), the inquiry types, reporting verbs, and reporting agents during the Aim move were examined to obtain the preferred patterns in the Aim move of each abstract. This information was utilised to analyse the relationship between the inquiry types and the verb tenses.

Findings

The close investigation of the corpus revealed some interesting features of the corpus. Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics of the corpus. The total number of the words was 22,457; with regard to the distribution of the words, almost 40% of the total was during the Background move, while the Method move followed this at 23%. The average length of the abstracts was 374 words, which indicated that the word count of the corpus was relatively larger than those of research paper abstracts, as predicted.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics of the corpus (n = 60)

	Total	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
Length (words)	22457	374	91.2	190	580
Background	307	5.12*	2.69	0	17
Aim	101	1.68*	1.35	0	8
Method	180	3*	2.45	0	12
Sentences					
Results	80	1.33*	3.49	0	17
Conclusion	104	1.73*	1.21	0	7
Total	772	12.9*	3.78	6	23

*The figures show the average numbers of the sentences in each move.

Table 5 indicates the verb tense frequency in each move. Overall, the present tense is predominant in all the moves. Especially, almost all of the sentences in the Aim move were written in the present tense. On the other hand, the frequency of the past tense was not high in the corpus and was used at most 17.8% during the Method move.

Table 5

Verb tense frequency in each move

Tenses	Moves		Background		Aim		Method		Results		Conclusion	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Present	219	71.3	100	99	144	80	66	82.5	91	87.5		
Present perfect	50	16.3	0	0	4	2.2	2	2.5	2	1.9		
Past	38	12.4	1	1	32	17.8	12	15	11	10.6		

As mentioned earlier, the inquiry types may affect the usage of the verb tense (Saeew et al., 2014; Santos, 1996). Table 6 shows the formulaic patterns of the Aim move, presenting frequently used reporting agents, inquiry types, and reporting verbs. The inquiry types of “paper,” “presentation,” and “study” were used more frequently than the other types. Further, the most common reporting verb was “examine,” as the number was more than double the other verbs. The authors in the corpus tended to use “I” as the reporting agent of their paper. However, it should be noted here that all the verbs in the Aim move were used in the present tense.

Table 6

Formulaic patterns of Aim move

Subjects		Reporting verbs
Reporting agents	Inquiry types	
I (25)	paper (26)	examine (18)
we (5)	presentation (20)	explore (8)
author (1)	study (12)	investigate (7)
	analysis (2)	argue (6)
	research (2)	is (5), focus (5)
	others (2)	demonstrate (4), discuss (4)
		provide (2), report (2)
		others (22)

Discussion

The Usage of Verb Tense in the Corpus

Some textbooks mentioned in this study have encouraged abstract writers to use the past tense in abstract writing. However, the writers of the abstracts in the corpus tended to adopt the present tense. Approximately 88% of the sentences were written in the present tense or the present perfect tense, while only 12% of them were written in the past tense. This result was a striking difference between the corpus and the instructions in some textbooks, which urged writers to use only the past tense. For

example, 71.3% of the sentences in the Background move were written in the present tense, while 16.3% were in the present perfect tense, meaning 86.2% of the sentences in the present perfect tense were used in the Background move. This tendency of using the present tense in the Background move well accords with previous studies, which claim that writers mentioned a well-known and established situation by using the present tense (Orasan, 2001; Wallwork, 2011). In addition, the usage of the present perfect also appears to coincide with the observations by Orasan (2001) and Wallwork (2011). Wallwork (2011) claims that the present perfect may be used when writers want to describe a continuation of a situation started in the past. This usage seems to match the objective of the Background move, where writers try to give the context or background of their research. Besides this objective, Salager-Meyer (1992) argues that the present perfect can illustrate gaps between the previous studies and the authors' own opinions or hypotheses, showing the novelties of their study. Orasan (2001) also points out that the weaknesses of the previous studies can be expressed by using the present perfect tense. Similarly, some examples can be found in the present corpus, as follows:

Example 1: Gap

Interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) development during study abroad **has usually been analyzed** with regard to host countries, where the target language is spoken as a native language, thereby ignoring the growing number of study abroad contexts, in which the target language is used as a lingua franca. **To address this research gap, this paper presents** a case study of ... (Extracted from the 16th IPrA conference abstract).

Example 2: Weakness

Unattached NPs **have not yet been systematically investigated** in Indonesian, yet colloquial Indonesian is particularly interesting for studying unattached NPs due to a combination of features, including the prevalence of unexpressed arguments, lack of copula, no cross-referencing between predicates and arguments, and indeterminacy of word classes (Ewing 2005). How then to best identify and analyse unattached NPs, not to mention predicates and the notion of constituency more generally? (Extracted from the 16th IPrA conference abstract).

Another noticeable finding was that almost all of the sentences in the Aim move were written in the present tense, even if the inquiry types of “study” or “research” were used in the Aim move. This contradicts Saeew et al. (2014) and Santos' (1996) observations, that if the inquiry type in the Aim move is “study” or “research,” then the past tense is preferred. This discrepancy can be explained by the differences in the purposes of the abstracts. That is, Saeew et al. (2014) and Santos (1996) analysed the

A STUDY ON USAGE OF VERB TENSE IN ABSTRACT WRITING

abstracts of research papers, whereas the abstracts analysed in this study were written for a conference contribution. In other words, the authors were supposed to make a presentation in the conference after submitting the abstracts to the organiser and should attract attention from the organiser and the participants of the conference. Regarding this, Swales and Feak (2009) point out that a conference abstract ‘will typically attempt to “sell” your work’ (p. 43) to the readers and ‘many conference abstracts need to make a strong appeal to the review committees’ (p. 45). Therefore, as mentioned by Saeew et al. (2014), Swales and Feak (2012), and Wallwork (2011), it may be natural for the authors in the corpus to make their abstracts more attractive, lively, and convincing by adopting the present tense in the Aim move. Regarding to the past tense use in the Aim move, there was one example of auxiliary *would* to express politeness (i.e., “I would like to”). Further, though the past tense, as Santos (1996) points out, may be used when hypotheses or assumptions are made in the Aim move, the corpus did not contain any sentence relating to hypotheses or assumptions.

Furthermore, the same tendency of the predominance of the present tense can be found in the Results and the Conclusion moves. To be exact, 82.5% of the sentences in the Results move and 87.5% of those in the Conclusion move were written in the present tense. This result can be ascribed to authors’ intention that the abstract should be endowed with liveliness, contemporary relevance, plausibility, and feasibility by adopting the present tense (Swales & Feak, 2012; Wallwork, 2011). However, Wallwork (2011) also claims that writers may use the past tense to show the achieved outcomes of their research. Therefore, one reasonable prediction is that the present tense was used in the Results and the Conclusion moves in the corpus as a matter of preference.

Additionally, the past tense was adopted in the Method move (17.8%) and in the Results move (15%) at relatively higher rates than other moves. It may be true that this tendency can be attributed to the nature of the Method and Results moves, where the past tense may be preferred. Further, this is in line with the instruction of using the past tense by Wallwork (2011) and the observations of the five researches in Table 1; namely, Salager-Meyer (1992), Santos (1996), Orasan (2001), Tseng (2011), and Saeew et al. (2014). Nevertheless, most of the authors in the corpus adopted the present tense in the Method (80%) and Results (82.5%) moves. Concerning this gap, Tseng’s (2011) observation can be an explanation. According to Tseng (2011), the present tense can be used even in the Results move ‘to show the continuing applicability of their findings’ (p. 32). The same thing might be applied to the Method move, in which researchers perhaps want to insist on the usability, plausibility, and applicability of the methodologies.

A STUDY ON USAGE OF VERB TENSE IN ABSTRACT WRITING

As has been seen above, the abstracts in the corpus tended to be written in the present tense and the present perfect tense. This differs from some instructions in the textbooks and observations in previous studies. One thing that can be said from this observation is that verb usage in real writing activities is very diverse and the writers use the verb tense according to their needs. This point is consistent with some remarks by Wallwork (2011) and Swales and Feak (2012). It should also be mentioned that verb usage can vary according to academic fields. For instance, Saeew et al. (2014) and Salager-Meyer (1992) report that researchers in the fields of medicine and science are apt to use the past tense in the abstracts. On the other hand, Swales and Feak (2012) assert that the present tense is likely to be used not in the fields of social sciences but in Physics, Chemistry, and Astrophysics. However, this current study has shown that the present tense can be used in the fields of arts and humanities, including pragmatics. These facts can lead to an assumption that there may be a strong motivation for using the present tense, even in the fields of social sciences. This can be supported by the remarks of Tseng (2011), saying that the abstracts in applied linguistics, which is part of the social science field, tends to be written in the present tense. Seden Can, Erkan Karabacak and Jingjing Qin (2016) also agree with this trend in the field of applied linguistics. Concerning the relation between the structure of the abstracts and tenses, starting with the present tense in the Background and the Aim moves, the past tense can be used in the Method and the Results moves occasionally. This suggests that an occasional shift to the past tense can be permissible as long as the present tense is used again in the Conclusion move to emphasise the achieved work. To sum up and answer the first research question, the results showed that the present tense and the present perfect tense are strongly preferred in the abstracts in the academic fields of arts, humanities, and pragmatics. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the sample size was relatively small ($N = 60$) and this result may not be applied to the rest of the abstracts in the conferences. The insufficiency of the sample, which is one of the limitations, can be tackled in further studies.

The Ideal Length of an Abstract in the Corpus

The average length of the abstracts in the corpus was 374 words and this was longer than those shown in the literature review section, where the average length of research paper abstracts is 182.86 words. Moreover, the average of the recommended lengths in the textbooks is 293 words. This result is thought to be reasonable because, as Swales and Feak (2009) point out, conference abstracts tend to be longer to incorporate plenty of information on the research and to “sell” the achieved work by the authors to the readers. Consequently, it can be said that an ideal length of an

A STUDY ON USAGE OF VERB TENSE IN ABSTRACT WRITING

abstract in an IPrA conference is around 374 words, which can be an answer to the second research question.

Further, one more area of focus is the length of each move in the corpus. For example, the Background move was the longest move on average. In total, it had 307 sentences and the average number of sentences was 5.12 sentences. This figure was 1.7 times as many as that of the Method move (3 sentences on average), which was the second longest move in the corpus. Contrary to the Background, the average length of the Results move was just 1.33 and this was a quarter of the Background move. These observations may mean that the abstracts in the corpus have relatively longer Background moves. Though this result was interesting in terms of the proportion of the moves, Andrade (2011) mentions that writers should make their background shorter because 'the reader is interested in the paper because of its findings, and not because of its background' (p. 173). Thus, this remark reveals a peculiarity of the corpus. In addition, this peculiarity does not seem to fit with the characteristics of conference abstracts. That is, the abstracts in the corpus were a contribution to the panels in the conferences and the participants in the panels should share some knowledge and issues of the topic in the panels. In other words, the Background move must be shorter in the situation where every participant shares the same background. To clarify, the reason for this can be a further study but it may be beyond the scope of this study.

Conclusion

This study has argued about the preferred verb tense in the corpus and the ideal length of the abstracts in the academic field. The most noticeable characteristic of the corpus was that the present tense and the present perfect tense were used most in every move. Further, the percentages were higher, especially in the Aim and Conclusion moves. It was shown that the writers seemed to use the present and the present perfect according to the functions. The present tense tended to be used to show and express established knowledge, liveliness, contemporary relevance, and plausibility, emphasising the achieved work. The present perfect was also used to indicate the gaps and weaknesses of the previous studies. These usages of the verb tenses can be regarded as the techniques of emphasising the superiority of the authors' own work to the previous studies. In addition, an ideal length of the abstracts has turned out to be longer than that in a research paper abstract. Moreover, the proportion of each move has also been shown that, though the authors tend to write longer backgrounds to provide the readers with the context of their research, this can be an

idiosyncrasy of the corpus. For novice writers, the points argued in this study can help them to write a persuasive abstract that attracts readers, especially in abstract writing in the academic field in question.

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A STUDY ON USAGE OF VERB TENSE IN ABSTRACT WRITING

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Appendix

Appendix A: The Five-move Analysis

Move 1: Situating the research (Background)

Move 2: Presenting the research (Aim)

Move 3: Describing the methodology (Method)

Move 4: Summarizing the results (Results)

Move 5: Discussing the research (Conclusion)

(Santos, 1996, renamed following Swales & Feak, 2012)