

Knowledge Presentation in Thesis Writing— Examining Move Use in Reviewing Literature

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Abstract

Reviewing literature for a research study is a highly complicated reading and writing process, which is assumed a rather formidable task for many graduate students. However, the concept of the “literature review” (LR) as a distinct type of genre has been constantly overlooked and the move structure of literature reviews unexplored. In addition, past studies mainly focused on the expert writing in journal articles rather than L2 students’ thesis writing. A gap between expert writing and graduate students’ thesis writing has not been explored. Therefore, we chose to study the move structure of LRs in master theses written by Taiwanese TEFL program graduates. This study included two research questions: (1) What is the move structure of the LR chapters in master theses in TEFL programs? (2) How are moves (or submoves) distributed in the collected LRs? Thirty theses were chosen using a stratified random method. A move structure with four major moves was formulated for this study to code the selected data. The statistical results showed that “conceptualizing themes in a field (Move 1)” makes the largest proportion, 56.96%, of the total occurrences, followed by “integrating previous works on the themes (Move 2),” 22.39%, “relating previous works to the current study (Move 3),” 11.74%, and “advancing to one’s own study (Move 4),” 8.91%. It is concluded that LRs composed by these graduates fundamentally serve to present relevant field knowledge. Classifying past literature on a given topic, critiquing, and announcing one’s own research are the moves (submoves) that most of the L2 graduate students lack in their LR writing.

Key Words: literature review, move structure, academic writing