

Morphological Error Analysis of Educational Research Abstracts

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Abstract

When one writes a technical paper be it a conference paper, a thesis, a dissertation, among others, he is required to write an abstract. The researcher observed that writers use different tenses of verbs in the same part of the abstract. It is posited that a writer must have commonly used a tense in most parts of the abstract. The researcher classified the sentences contained in the abstract according to the purpose of the writer after which he identified the tenses of the verbs. The results reveal that the simple present tense, the simple past tense; the simple future tense; the present perfect tense; and the past perfect tense are used. The simple past tense is the most commonly used particularly in the explanation and narration of the research methodology. It is used in disclosing research findings and in reporting information about issues and ideas encountered before writing the actual research. The simple present comes next which is used in the introduction that may include situational analysis, a general idea, and the like. The writers also used this in the conclusion and recommendation. The present perfect tense was rarely used. The researcher concludes that different tenses of verbs were used in combination though the sentences indicated the same purpose.

Key Words: Morphology, Assessment, Educational Research Abstracts, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Communication is simply and generally defined as an act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express and exchange information or to express one's ideas thoughts, feelings, etc. to someone else. It is further defined as the act of conveying intended meanings from one entity or group to another through the use of mutually understood signs and semiotic rules. Likewise, communication is either verbal or nonverbal. The former uses either spoken or written words, while the latter uses wordless clues.

English is spoken across the globe, hence it is one of the major languages used by different peoples in whatever purpose it may serve them. More peoples learn the language not only for the sake of business and pleasure but also for academic purposes. In the Philippine educational system, most subjects are taught using the language though it is the Filipino's second language.

Writing is one of the macro skills that must be developed if one is interested in it. A lot of rules have to be followed and observed when one would like to communicate using the written form because if there are rules violated, these results in either communication breakdown or communication gap as the very aim of it is the successful transmission of mean to the receiver. Written communication is essential for communicating complicated such as statistics and other data, that could not easily communicated through speech alone. Written communication also allows information to be recorded so that it can be referred to at a later date.<https://blog.udemy.com>

Written communication has to be clear and brief so that the message that one would like to put across will be delivered successfully. A good written report has to convey the important information using precise, grammatically correct language, without using more words than are needed.

When one writes a technical paper, be it a conference paper, a thesis, a dissertation, a feasibility study, among others, he is required to write an abstract. The researcher observes that different tenses of verbs are used in which case it becomes confusing. An abstract is a very important part of a paper as it provides a comprehensive summary of a research output and it helps the readers quickly understand the purpose of the researcher, the methods used, the results, the conclusions drawn and the recommendations forwarded all in normally contained in just a paragraph.

Moreover, an abstract also helps the readers decisively determine the value of the works whether the full content of the works should be read or not. It is in this light that abstracts have to be written to give

precise and concise information about the content and should be made very understandable to the readers. It can be considered as a threshold for the readers to get through the full content of any research undertaking in haste. Its role should not be taken for granted as according to Hartley (2003) abstract captures the essence, it tends to be the first part of a journal article to be read.

It must be noted that an abstract is a brief overview not an evaluative summary of a longer piece of writing. There are different kinds of abstract which contain different information. Social science for example contains a statement of the research problem or purpose, the method and methodology, the findings, and the conclusion. On the other hand, humanities abstracts contain a description of the problem, the main position or the argument, and an overview of the contents.

In writing an abstract, researchers try to use appropriate words to introduce their researches, to disseminate the research findings, together with the conclusions and recommendations. By and large, the researcher includes in his abstract the following: a) a brief introduction that may contain a situational analysis, a general truth or an idea; b) a presentation of the research where a hypothesis and research problems are briefly discussed; c) methodology-the population, the data-gathering instrument and the statistical tools together with the processes involved; d) summary of the results/findings; e) discussion of the results with recommendations.

According to Swales (1990), the individual part of an abstract is called “Move”. There are five moves in an abstract, to wit: introduction; methodology; result; analysis; and discussion, (Cross,2006). On the other hand, Philip, (1997) mentioned that an abstract has five parts: motivation; problem statement; approach; result; and discussion. Though the names and the descriptions of the different moves are rather different in some cases, the purpose of writing the description of each move is the same which is to present a comprehensive and lucid information to the readers.

Writing abstracts is not only a matter of condensing the information, but the use of words and tenses must be taken into consideration. Abstracts must be syntactically and semantically coherent. To ensure comprehension the text has to be intelligently structured.

The English language, unlike some languages where tense is insignificant or does not even exist at all, has different features one of which is the concept of tense considered very vital for more efficient and effective communication. Tenses are used in English to denote time. Some languages use tense to talk about time; others have no tenses but still use time using different methods. In order to have a consistent and readable abstract, attention must be paid to the tense and the mood of the verb, (Borker and Chatman,1986).

Writing any form of text using the English language entails a painstaking use of tenses. The academic abstract is one of the situations where tenses play a very vital role such that comprehension is enhanced. Doing research requires a lot of time as it needs a report from its start to its finish. Undertaking a research is to a large extent a matter of disentangling and critically evaluating different viewpoints and strands of thinking, and it is of real significance for readers to be able to identify the provenance of the analysis.

It can be posited that a number of studies on the readability of abstract have also been undertaken. However, the researchers have mainly concentrated on the schematic structure of the abstract, (Hyland, 2004). A few studies have attempted to investigate the linguistic features of an abstract or even link the realization with the different moves of the abstract. Nonetheless, each study tried to focus only on a limited linguistic features of the abstract and it is difficult to determine when, where and what tense of the verb a researcher should use. For example, Weisberg and Buker (1990) stated that move 1 which is about the background information of the research, the simple present tense should be used in writing; for move 2 is about the purpose and the presentation of the research, the past and the present perfect tense should be used; for move 3 which shows the research methodology, the simple past tense should be used; and move 4 which indicates the results, the simple past tense is also used; and for move 5 which is about the conclusion and the discussion, the simple present tense should be used.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The researcher aimed at determining the different English tenses of verbs used in the different abstracts considered in this study. The objectives are the following:

1. To analyze the forms and functions of tenses of verbs used in each move in the abstract.
2. To determine the English tenses of verbs used in the abstracts in regards to their frequencies.
3. To identify English tenses that are appropriate for use in the different moves of an abstract.
4. To craft an abstract model which may be adopted for use in writing educational abstracts in English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There have been studies that were conducted at defining the types and functions of abstract. Besides, separate studies were also undertaken on how to write a well-constructed and effective abstract. In order to attain the objectives as articulated in this research initiative, the following were undertaken and observed by the researcher :

According to Bhatia (1993) the first step in selecting the appropriate kind and size of corpus for linguistic analysis is to define the genre or sub-genre that one is working with such that it will be distinguishable from other genres that are either similar or closely related to it. It is in this premise that the population considered for analysis in this study was composed of educational abstracts. The researcher randomly selected abstracts of published researches. Thirty-three were considered for morphological analysis. The researcher belongs to the College of Teacher Education which is why abstracts considered are all about education. He used a simple way of analyzing the data by reading through and perusing every sentence of the abstracts then tally in order to get the frequencies of the tenses used in all the abstracts. Percentage was employed as statistical treatment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings, the analysis and the discussion of the findings.

Table 1- Tenses used in Move 1: Situating the Research

TENSES	FREQUENCY	%
SIMPLE PRESENT	61	64.89
SIMPLE PAST	21	22.34
SIMPLE FUTURE	4	4.26
PRESENT PERFECT	5	5.32
PAST PERFECT	3	3.19
TOTAL	94	100

In the introduction, there are five tenses which were used: the simple present tense, the present perfect tense, the simple future tense, the simple past tense, and the past perfect tense. However, the simple present is the most commonly used followed by the simple past tense, and the present perfect tense. The past perfect tense is the least in terms of usage in this part of the abstract. The simple present tense being the most commonly used tense by the writers conforms with the Beason and Lester (2000) who said that this tense is used to indicate statements of fact or generalization or to describe a repeated or habitual action.

Table 2- Tenses used in Move 2: Presenting the Research

TENSES	FREQUENCY	%
SIMPLE PRESENT	32	47.06
SIMPLE PAST	34	50
SIMPLE FUTURE	-	-
PRESENT PERFECT	2	2.94
PAST PERFECT	-	-
TOTAL	68	100

Part 2 of the abstract is the presentation of the research problem or simply specifying the problems the researcher he would to find answers to. The majority of the researchers used the simple past tense of the verb. Some made use of the simple present tense and very few used the present perfect tense. None of them used the simple future tense. Obviously, like in the introduction, different tenses and forms were used. Declerck (1991) considered this a very difficult challenge to understand the linguistic representation of time. He is primarily interested in the interactions of the different means of marking time in a language.

According to him, an absolute tense is one which relates the time of the situation directly to the “temporal zero point”, which is normally the time of speech and functions as an orientation time. He explained further that the temporal zero-point is the most basic (unmarked) orientation time in the English tense system. He also claims that tense is organized in terms of two-time spheres, past and non-past which are conceptual divisions of time. The past time sphere is conceived as a time span of indefinite length which lies wholly before zero point and disconnected from zero point. The present time is conceived of as a time span of definite length which includes zero point. He further explained that the time spheres are divided into four time zeros. The past time sphere corresponds to the past time zero. The present time sphere corresponds to the pre-present, present, and the post-present time zones. The present perfect has a temporal focus on the present, whereas in the past, the temporal focus is on the past.

Table 3- Tenses used in Move 3: Describing the research process

TENSES	FREQUENCY	%
SIMPLE PRESENT	13	13.13
SIMPLE PAST	79	79.80
SIMPLE FUTURE	-	-
PRESENT PERFECT	5	5.05
PAST PERFECT	2	2.02
TOTAL	99	100

For part 3 of the abstract it concerns with the methodology of the research which includes among other things: the research design, the data-gathering procedure and instrument, the population and the statistical tool used. It is revealed that most of the abstract writers whose works were considered in the study used the simple past tense. It must be noted that almost all the processed involved have already been completed, hence the use of the tense. The simple present was also used but the simple present was the least, and none of the writers used the future tense neither the simple nor the perfect tense.

Though there are various ways to communicate, some researchers claim that academic communications need a certain pattern one of which is the correct usage of verbs and their tenses. One of the problems of non-native speakers of English is the confusion about tenses of verbs which apparently is an obstacle for English communication. Errors can adversely and significantly alter the intended meanings especially in higher-

level communication. Bhatia (1993) said that the correct use of tense is a crucial skill for one who wants to express personal thoughts in English particularly in writing skill. He said that the more precisely an individual can express thoughts and meanings, the more effective communication will be, and the more potential for success they will be in their interpersonal communications throughout their lives.

Borker and Chatman (1986) mentioned that in the pursuit of consistency and readability of abstracts, attention must be paid to the tenses and moods of the verbs. They stated in their papers titled “Criteria for Acceptable Abstracts” most abstracters’ manuals devote some space to the discussion of the verb form.

Table 4- Tenses used in Move 4: Reporting/Summarizing the results

TENSES	FREQUENCY	%
SIMPLE PRESENT	5	6.49
SIMPLE PAST	70	90.91
SIMPLE FUTURE	-	-
PRESENT PERFECT	1	1.30
PAST PERFECT	1	1.30
TOTAL	77	100

Relative to part 4 of the abstract, abstract writers summarize the results of the research undertaking, they report what they learned, what they invented or created. Based on the analysis of the sentences considered, the majority of the writers/researchers used the simple past tense. Though the simple present is next to it, only 6.49 percent of the 77 sentences used the simple present tense of the verb and only a few used the past perfect tense. It is very glaring that there were no sentences that contain the simple future tense. This part of the abstract simple talks about, “What was found”, therefore the simple past is used; though in reporting, the writer also makes use of the simple present tense.

Table 5-Tenses used in Move 5- Presenting the conclusions and forwarding the recommendations

TENSES	FREQUENCY	%
SIMPLE PRESENT	71	75.53
SIMPLE PAST	17	18.09
SIMPLE FUTURE	3	3.19
PRESENT PERFECT	2	2.13
PAST PERFECT	1	1.06
TOTAL	94	100

Insofar as part 5 of the abstracts are concerned which contains the conclusions and recommendations of the researcher, it was found out that the simple present, the present perfect, the simple past, the simple future tense, and the past perfect tense of the verbs were used. Most sentences use the simple present tense of the verb. Next to this is the simple past tense. The use of the present perfect tense and the simple future tense is distributed with very small frequencies. According to Reid (2000), the abstract of research reports and background information is usually written in present tense while the actual research is described in the past tense or present perfect tense. He emphatically stated that verb tense errors can be serious; they often interfere with communication.

The pattern of the abstract in relation to the use of the tense of the verb can occur cyclically. This contains categories that arise from the text and that describe the transactional, interactional and logical functions of

the language in such a way to reflect the writer’s constantly shifting “foregrounding of these different aspects.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the foregoing findings, the researcher formulated the following conclusions:

1. A total of four hundred twenty nine sentences that contain sixteen thousand three hundred two words were analyzed in this research undertaking.
2. The researchers used different tenses/ forms of verbs in writing abstracts: the simple present tense; the simple past tense; the simple future tense; the present perfect tense; and the past perfect tense.
3. The simple past tense is the most commonly used in abstract writing followed by the simple present tense.
4. The simple past tense of the verb got the highest frequencies in Moves 2, 3, and 4. The simple present tense is highest in frequencies for Moves 1 and 5.
5. Five tense forms and all the tenses are used in the abstracts but there are cases that one or two are not used in a move. Likewise they differ in terms of their frequencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings and conclusions of this research undertaking, the researcher would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Inasmuch as the researcher considered educational abstracts for morphological analysis, a separate and similar study has to be conducted utilizing other fields for analysis.
2. It is equally interesting to make a comparison between abstracts written by a native and non-native English speakers. Doing this will lead to the identification of their similarities and differences.
3. For a more extensive study, tense analysis may also be undertaken for other forms of writing, like news, advertisements, among others.

ABSTRACT MODEL

The research reveals that based on the abstract analysis made focusing on the tenses of the verbs, there are five verb forms and all the tenses of the verb were used. However, the simple past tense got the highest frequency which is followed by the simple present tense. The other verb forms with different frequencies include the simple future tense, the present perfect tense, and the past perfect tense.

It is in this light that the researcher has crafted a simple model for writing educational abstracts which may be useful to neophyte abstract writers who are also interested to learn the tenses and verb forms in abstract writing. We must take note that this is not an absolute model as models are diverse the appropriateness and accuracy of the use of verbs must be given premium as the meaning the abstract writer would like to put across may be altered and affected.

The researcher conducted this research which aimed at 1)_____;

2)_____; and 3)_____. The samples used were _____. The researcher utilized _____ and _____ as data-gathering instruments. For the realization of the objectives/purposes of this study, the procedure consists of the following: 1)_____;2)_____; and 3)_____.

Statistics that were utilized in analyzing the data obtained are 1)_____;2)_____;3)_____;and 4)_____. The research findings are the following:1)_____

2)_____; 3)_____;4)_____;and 5)_____. Based on the findings, the researcher formulated these conclusions, to wit: 1) _____;2)_____

3)_____; and 4)_____. In the light of the findings of this study and the conclusions drawn, the researcher provides these recommendations as follows: 1)_____

2) _____; and 3)_____.

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