

**GENRE-RELATED DIMENSIONS
IN ACADEMIC WRITING
AT MASTER LEVEL**

NICOLETA-ADINA PANAIT

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Preface by Laura-Mihaela Mureșan



**EDITURA UNIVERSITARĂ
București**

Colecția FILOLOGIE

Referent științific: Prof. Dr. Mihai Zdrenghea

Redactor: Laura Nicolescu
Tehnoredactor: Ameluța Vișan
Coperta: Monica Balaban

Editură recunoscută de Consiliul Național al Cercetării Științifice (C.N.C.S.) și inclusă de Consiliul Național de Atestare a Titlurilor, Diplomelor și Certificatelor Universitare (C.N.A.T.D.C.U.) în categoria editurilor de prestigiu recunoscut.

Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României

PANAIT, NICOLETA ADINA

Genre-related dimensions in academic writing at master level /

Nicoleta Adina Panait. - București : Editura Universitară, 2023

Conține bibliografie

ISBN 978-606-28-1646-9

80

DOI: (Digital Object Identifier): 10.5682/9786062816469

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Editura Universitară
Editor: Vasile Muscalu
B-dul. N. Bălcescu nr. 27-33, Sector 1, București
Tel.: 021.315.32.47
www.editurauniversitara.ro
e-mail: redactia@editurauniversitara.ro

Distribuție: tel.: 021.315.32.47 / 0745 200 718/ 0745 200 357
comenzi@editurauniversitara.ro
www.editurauniversitara.ro

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is based on the PhD research I conducted under Prof. Dr. Mihai Zdrengeha's academic supervision to whom I would like to express my gratitude for his receptiveness to exploratory ideas that have allowed for a dynamic exchange of perspectives, fostering an environment where innovation could thrive. His mentorship has not only enriched my academic understanding but has also influenced the very fabric of this book.

My sincere gratitude extends to Prof. Dr. Laura Mureșan, whose mentoring role in my life transcends the boundaries of academia. For decades, Professor Mureșan has consistently provided unwavering support to professionals in our academic field. Professor Mureșan's exceptional ability to blend knowledge and wisdom with genuine care has had a lasting impact on the professional growth of many. The influence of her mentorship is evident in the pages of this work, serving as a testimony to her enduring commitment to nurturing the potential of those under her guidance.

In recognizing the impact of these exceptional mentors, I am reminded that academic achievements are not solitary endeavors, but the result of collaborative efforts and guidance.

Finally, I dedicate the completion of this book to my mother and father, Marusia and Gheorghe, and my daughter, Diana, three remarkable individuals whose support has always been the driving force behind my accomplishments.

PREFACE

This book proposed by Nicoleta-Adina Panait is based on her PhD research, concluded in 2018 and it represents a valuable contribution to the study of applied linguistics in an interdisciplinary approach. In the execution of this complex study, Nicoleta-Adina Panait demonstrates thorough research skills, based on a solid linguistic background, coupled with an interest in exploring the various facets of state-of-the-art linguistic analysis methods.

This book results from the author's pursuit to bring a valuable contribution to the field of applied linguistics in an interdisciplinary approach. The analysis of written communication in English focuses on the specific genre features encountered in master's dissertations within the dynamics of linguistic competence development in a non-Anglophone country. The study captures what could be considered state-of-the-art in a given academic context in the time span covered by the research, while also pointing to evolving processes in dissertation writing: the continuous refining of generic features, methodological complexity a.s.o. In the context of university internationalization objectives in general, and the increasing concerns within the Romanian academic environment to enhance the linguistic skills of university teaching staff, this work examines these complex linguistic realities from multiple perspectives: at the macro level of organizing the text in a corpus of master's dissertations, as well as at the micro level of linguistic details, by comparing them to the descriptions of language proficiency levels in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). Genre analysis is complemented by integrating the perspectives of professors and graduates of the master's programme, which constitutes the case study, to explore possible correlations between the level of linguistic competence acquired by programme participants (as reflected in the analyzed texts) and its potential impact on educational activities, especially when conducted in English.

Following a brief introductory chapter, which includes the rationale for this topic and an overview of the thesis structure and sources used, Chapter 2 ("Theoretical Perspective") outlines the conceptual and theoretical

framework of the research, with relevant methodological comparisons and delimitations, highlighting the latest trends in the field of genre analysis in non-Anglophone academic environments and corpus-based analysis.

Chapter 3 ("Corpus Description") brings to the forefront the case study in Romania based on a corpus of 25 representative dissertations, written in English, within an interdisciplinary master's programme designed for university teaching staff in the Romanian academic context. This chapter describes both the composition of the READ corpus (Romanian English Academic Discourse) and the steps taken in this corpus-based analysis using specialized software (AntConc).

Chapter 4 ("Results and Discussions") is the most extensive and consists of multiple sub-chapters, further subdivided into sub-sub-chapters. The main sub-chapters include "IMRD - Introduction - Method - Results - Discussion" (following the literature in Anglophone linguistics applied to the analysis of dissertations and research articles), "Macro-level Analysis," "Micro-level Analysis," and "Triangulation - The Voice of Professors and Graduates." The textual analysis focuses on the Discussion and Conclusion sections of the dissertations to identify the specific features of the analyzed corpus in comparison to the established features in the Anglophone academic environment, as detailed in the genre analysis and corpus-based analysis literature. The merit of this applied linguistics book lies not only in its focus on master's dissertations written in English in the Romanian academic context but also in its comprehensive methodological approach, which combines genre analysis with the analysis of a rigorously constructed corpus using corpus linguistics techniques. Furthermore, the author integrates the evaluation of linguistic features identified at the micro level by comparing them to the internationally recognized and widely accepted language proficiency level descriptors, as developed by the Council of Europe and further detailed by experts from the British Council and the EAQUALS international association. Academic discourse analyses are present in the literature of other non-Anglophone countries, especially when comparing native English-speaking researchers' language with that of native speakers of other languages (e.g. Spanish, Italian, Polish, Czech, etc.), but in these studies, there is no comparison with level descriptors developed at European level. Therefore, this book can be considered groundbreaking in opening new research perspectives, not only within Romanian applied linguistics, but also in a broader European context.

An additional merit lies in the "triangulation" through the qualitative analysis of opinions expressed by professors involved in coordinating and conducting the master's programme, as well as by programme graduates, who reflect on the impact of the programme on their own educational and research activities. Integrating the perspective of professors teaching in the Master's program is a valuable contribution of this research, as it allows the author to compare her own research findings with the views expressed by the professors, who, based on the identification of the development needs of programme participants, have introduced new courses and/or adapted existing ones in order to more effectively facilitate the development of academically relevant communication skills. Indirectly, these new curriculum developments confirm the assessment undertaken by the author in her applied linguistics research conducted on the texts of master's dissertations. In this 360-degree evaluative approach, the circle is closed by integrating the perspective of programme graduates, who refer to the skills, experience, and inspiration gained through the programme, allowing them to approach their own educational and research activities in a new way.

The work draws to a close with a chapter of conclusions and implications, followed by appendices, tables, and images, a glossary of terms and abbreviations used in the work, an extensive, diverse, up-to-date bibliography, and a substantial set of appendices that illustrate the research process incorporated into this book. This complex study allows the author to reach highly relevant conclusions for both the specific applied linguistics field of genre analysis and corpus-based research in our country and for the deepening of the relationship between linguistics and the educational dimension. The author's work also illustrates the multiple dimensions of methodological complementarity, allowing her to explore new, less-researched areas that are all the more valuable for their potential.

From the reading of the entire work, the rigour of the scientific approach in addressing a highly relevant subject emerges, as well as the originality of the book. At its core lies thorough research, reflected in extensive, harmoniously integrated bibliographic references and in the applied part. Therefore, considering the timeliness of the topic and the analysis methods used, the work deserves to be published so that a wider audience can access it.

Laura-Mihaela Mureşan
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Initial considerations

Argument for analyzing genre-related dimensions in master dissertations

University teachers, professors, in general, are models to their students and therefore, not only do they have to present subject specific knowledge professionally, but also need to set an example when teaching in English as a medium of instruction. Thus, they try to continuously develop professionally for themselves, but also for the students they teach, guide, monitor and eventually test. In a Romanian context, teachers, members of the academic community who fail or refuse to develop, cannot advance on the professional ladder; maybe even worse, they would have to leave the Higher Education system. What does *to develop* mean? Developing may imply publishing articles in national and international professional journals, participating in conferences, but also teaching professionally in their mother tongue, or through the medium of a foreign language, with special reference to English, in this book. The accession into the European Union has come with even more challenges, therefore Romanian academic institutions are trying to support the effort made by its scholars to harmonise their teaching practices and the way they conduct and report research, since, as mentioned above, these have become criteria in career development.

Therefore, this book will be using the *genre-based approach* to explore how English language teaching / learning, combined with integrative approaches to research and education can generate beneficial effects at several levels of professional growth. The context is given by an interdisciplinary Teacher Development master programme (“EDU-RES”) at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, mainly dedicated to its academic staff, but not only, as one of the main tools that the university

offered its economics researchers and not only to help with “*familiarizing themselves with internationally-accepted research practices and to develop their writing expertise.*” (Muresan and Pérez-Llantada 2014)

Setting the scene

Initiated in 2006 the Master Programme *Research and Teacher Education for Business and Economics (EDU-RES)* “*is the first of its kind in the Romanian academic context and has been awarded the European Language Label 2011 for innovation and creativity in education*”. Looking at its mission, which says the programme “*is designed to facilitate personal professional improvement, while contributing to institutional developments and quality assurance, integrating the research and educational dimensions, in accordance with the latest international practice in higher education*”. (Appendices 1A and 1B, EDU-RES Leaflet, 2016). As specified on its web site, one of the main objectives of the programme is “*to contribute to the development of integrated competencies in areas such as:*

- *communication in English for academic purposes and for a variety of international professional settings, integrating language and culture;*
- *research practice, with a focus on project design, methodological aspects and related communication skills for presenting and publishing research outcomes internationally;*
- *teaching and evaluation practice, so as to facilitate student learning, with special reference (but not limited) to Higher Education for business and economics*”.¹

Through this book we will be able to explore if and how the various features of the dissertations analysed reflect the above-mentioned programme objectives. Since the programme has brought together professionals with an interest in improving their English language level and communication skills, their teaching, research methodology and publication skills, the 25 dissertations that constitute the corpus of this current research cover various specializations, e.g. business management, micro-economics, marketing, agri-business, finance, accounting, cybernetics, but also law, engineering, mathematics, economic geography, history, etc.

A genre and corpus-based analysis of the *Discussion* and *Conclusions* sections of 25 representative dissertations will allow us to look

¹ <http://www.edures.ase.ro/index.html>

into various linguistic, thematic and attitudinal aspects, which can be considered relevant for the transfer of expertise from English Language Teaching (ELT) to other professional domains. The book will also include potential cascading processes as reflected by the academics'/master students' perspective. Each participant in the M.A. programme (most of them being university tutors, lecturers and associate professors) has worked towards the same goals by using the same measures. Once they achieved them, they may have wanted to pass them on to their students and department colleagues.

Why the *Discussions* and *Conclusions* sections? According to Dudley-Evans (1994), students have always experienced the greatest difficulty writing the discussion section and we dare add the conclusions as well. These are reasons why it is important to perform genre analysis on the *discussions and conclusions* features of these dissertation papers that belong to experienced members of academia. The book will first identify the structural units and then will attempt to model the organisational patterns as cognitive structures.

Overall purpose

At the fundamental research level, the **main aim** of this book is to:

- explore genre characteristics of master dissertations in English in a specific Romanian academic context
- find out the genre expectations of this professional domain

Specific aims include:

- Identifying genre features shared by all (or most) of the dissertations
- Highlighting the differences depending on the students' levels
- Determining how written communication is being altered?
- Analyzing the degree of tolerance per level
- Providing a measure of the dichotomy convention/variation in master dissertations.

At the applied level, our aim is to offer a theoretical grounding for attaining a higher level of efficiency in teaching/training participants in the master, in their double role, as master students and programme academics to