

Mood Choices and Functions in Background Information of Arts-Based Research Article Abstracts

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Abstract:

Motivated by the scanty of works on background information of abstracts, this article analyses the discourse functions of mood choices in background information of arts-based research article abstracts. Background information segments of three hundred abstracts of arts-based research articles obtained from the internet and purposively selected were analysed using insights from the systemic functional linguistic tool of mood. Given the generic compliant function – based categorisation adopted, five kinds of indicative mood structures namely; mission indicative mood, premises setting, assumption indicative mood; justification and classification mood are found to characterise the data but premises setting mood choices which function to: (i) give historical background to the study; (ii) define concept(s) that are central to the study at hand; (iii) anchor or state the research objective(s) and (iv) build up arguments against existing (previous) studies with a view to establishing the justification for the current research are observed to be predominant in the data.

This study concludes therefore that an understanding of mood choices and their generic compliant functions has potency of finding lasting solution to the problems being encountered by budding academics in writing their Background Information (BI). It equally serves as useful material for academic discourse pedagogy.

Keywords: Mood Structure, Generic-Compliant Function, Background Information, Research Article Abstracts, Arts-Based Journals

1. Introduction

Within the Systemic Functional Grammatical (SFG) theory propounded by Halliday, choices of meaning are organized into three main components namely; the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions (cf. Eggins and Martins, 1997: 238; Montemayor-Borsinger, 2003: 39). In this study, we are concerned with the interpersonal metafunction most specifically the mood structure, choices

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and functions in research article abstract as a genre of academic discourse. Studies on mood structure, choices and functions reveal that scholars have largely concentrated on variants of discourse namely; classroom, political, literary, persuasive-cum-advertising, religious and historical-cum-autobiographical discourses (e.g., see Li(2001), Huang (2002), Gregory (2007); Patpong, (2009); Ruijuan (2010); Yeibo, (2011); Kondowe, (2014a, 2014b); Fikri, Dewi and Suarnayaja (2014); Shakila (2015); Koussouhon and Dossoumou (2015); Noor, Ali, Muhabat and Kazemian (2016); Yu and Wu (2016); Chen and Shuo (2018); etc.). Li (2001) is a study of interpersonal meaning of Reflexive Expressions in autobiography. Huang (2002) is an interpersonal analysis of Du Mu's "Qingming" and its Translated Versions. Gregory (2007) explores the interface among Mood/Subordination/Reference in Spanish. Patpong (2009) is a systemic functional analysis of Amulet advertisement as a persuasive discourse in Thai. Ruijuan, (2010) explores the interpersonal metafunction resident in Barack Obama's Victory Speech. Yeibo, (2011) is a discourse-stylistic analysis of mood structures in selected poems of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo.

Besides, while Kondowe (2014a) explores the transitivity features of President Bingu Wa Mutharika's inaugural Address with particular focus on ideologies in the address, Kondowe (2014b) analyses interpersonal metafunctions in the President's second term political discourse. Fikri, Dewi and Suarnayaja (2014) is a mood structure analysis of Teacher Talk in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Shakila (2015) analyses interpersonal metafunction in Nelson Mandela's Presidential inauguration speech. Koussouhon and Dossoumou (2015) explore mood, epistemic and deontic modality patterns in an extract culled from *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) by one of the Nigerian new millennium female writer, Kaine Agary. Noor, Ali, Muhabat and Kazemian (2016) highlights the functional and semantic properties of the last address of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Yu and Wu (2016) is an investigation of the roles of mood and modality in the recreation of the image of Chan master Huineng in four English translations of *The Platform Sutra* which is a collection of the public sermons and personal conversations of Huineng. Chen and Shuo (2018) explore the realization of language interpersonal function using Barak Obama's speech at the White House Correspondents' Dinner in 2016. The study specifically focuses on mood, modality and person system of the interpersonal metafunction and how these are realised in the Obama's speech.

Research article abstract as a genre of academic discourse has not been much explored most especially from the perspective of

mood structure and function aspect of interpersonal metafunction of SFG. The few works that we are aware of in this area have only explored the discourse structure (Rimrott, 2007), the modality features (Olaniyan and Adeniji, 2015), generic structure and discourse functions (Olaniyan, 2014a) of the abstracts and hedging and boosting as interactional metadiscourse (Kondowe, 2014c) in literature doctoral dissertation. Besides, Olaniyan (2014b) also explores the generic structure of problem statements' segments of arts-based research article abstracts. Motivated by the paucity of works in this area, the present study therefore explores the mood choices and functions in problem statements segment of abstracts of research articles in arts-based disciplines. With this, we hope to fill the existing vacuum and, simultaneously, complement existing studies on academic discourse in general and research article abstracts in particular. This study is significant in complementing existing works in academic discourse in general and research article abstracts in particular. Second, it will also provide additional insights on mood structure categories that characterize arts-based research article abstracts.

Data for this study were obtained from the internet through purposive selection of 300 abstracts of Research Articles published between 2001 and 2010 in learned journals of arts-based disciplines. The journals selected are domiciled in universities in the inner circle (countries where English is spoken as mother tongue). The background information aspects of the selected abstracts were carefully examined and analysed from the purview of mood structure aspect of interpersonal metafunction. We have chosen to analyse the data using the mood structures of interpersonal metafunctions because in speech or writing, the mood structure reflects interactional or interpersonal meanings. Likewise, academic discourse has also taken up an interactive dimension because it has, over the last two or three decades, become a persuasive enterprise involving a form of social interaction between writers and readers (cf. Hyland, 2005: 173, Afros, 2007: 3 etc.). This position is further corroborated by Hunston (1993: 57) as she notes that the production of a written text is a social process both in the sense that “it represents the interaction between a writer and a reader” (Sinclair, 1981) and in the sense that the “text plays a role in a particular social system” (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). Besides, in categorising our data in this study, we have adopted the generic-compliant based categorisation as language is used to perform certain generic-compliant functions that are peculiar to research article abstracts as a genre of academic discourse.

2. Studies on Research Articles and Background Information in Research Article

Abstracts

Studies on research article as a genre of academic communication have largely focused on various sections of the genre, namely, research article introductions, acknowledgements, discussion sections, methodology section and abstract sections of the articles. Considering the research article abstracts, for example, available literature reveals that abstracts are composed of variants of generic structural elements: Background Information (BI), Problem Statement (PS), Statements of Objectives (SO), Theoretical Framework (TF), Methodology (M), Analytical Framework (AF), Findings (F) and Conclusion(C). Among these, problem statement and statement of objectives have been singled out for generic structural and linguistic analyses (see Olaniyan, 2014a, 2014b, Olaniyan and Adeniji, 2015; Adeyanju and Olaniyan, 2016). Other segments of the abstracts, most especially, the background information have been scarcely studied. The present study is therefore motivated by the scarcity of work on background information segments of research article abstracts.

Background Information (BI) is just a little bit of information about a completed research work, an on-going one or a proposed one. It provides readers, most especially interested members of the academic discourse community, with the necessary background or context for a research work and motivates the research (cf. Hyland, 2000). It includes information about the research problem, and demonstrates that the researcher has a good understanding of the literature related to a particular research area. Background Information (BI) section or aspect of research article abstract provides readers with enough information and context which enables them to follow the researchers' description of their research works. BI section of the abstracts also explains the context of the research, i.e. the discourse genre or domain and the central concept being handled in a research work.

Besides, this section called 'introductory move' (Hyland, 2000: 16) illustrates how the research contributes to what is already known about the problem. For Feltrim (2003), this introductory move can be divided into at least three types of content, namely; Arguing for topic prominence, Making topic generalizations, Defining terms, Objects or process, and Identifying a gap in current knowledge.

3.0 Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a theory of language that adopts a sociological and functional-based approach to language study. Considering the sociological and functional interest of systemic

grammar, its major concerns, as noted by Berry (1977: 1), are perhaps *behaviour*, *function* and *situation*. Systemic functional grammar considers (views) language as a form of behaviour which is functional, as something that we do with a purpose or more. This implies that language use is goal directed. Besides, systemic grammar is also interested in language as social semiotics – how people use language with each other in accomplishing everyday social life (Halliday, 1978 quoted in Eggins, 2004: 3). This interest, as noted by Eggins (op.cit), leads systemic linguists to advance four main theoretical claims about language. These are (i) language use is functional; (ii) its function is to make meanings; (iii) These meanings are influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they are exchanged and (iv) The process of using language is a semiotic process, a process of making meanings by choosing. Eggins (2004: 3) has summarized these theoretical claims by describing the systemic grammatical approach as a *functional-semantic approach to language*. Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is composed of several branches namely; the concept of language, metafunction, text and context, genre analysis and generic structure potential and finally, its linguistic components. For the purpose of the present study, we shall focus on genre analysis and generic structure potential and metafunctional aspect of systemic functional grammar because they are central to our present engagement. We discuss these in turn.

3.1. Genre and Genre Analysis

Genre as a concept in Systemic Functional Grammar has attracted variants of scholarly attentions in the last few decades (e.g. see Miller, 1984; Martin, 1984; 1985; Martin, Christie and Rothery, 1987; Swales 1990; Eggins, 2004 etc.). Swales' (1990) definition of genre shall be taken as our guide. For Swales (1990), genre is composed of “communicative events, whose structure and context are shaped by the purpose of the discourse community in which the genre is situated.” In other words, the communicative purpose of a particular genre, which is recognized by the experts of that field, determines what occurs or does not occur in the textual realization of the genre. This implies that a genre is not only determined by its formal features/properties but more largely by the communicative purpose it is designed to serve within a particular culture or discourse community. In the Systemic Functional Grammatical (SFG) approach to genre, different genres are different ways of using language to achieve different culturally established tasks, and texts of different genres are texts which are achieving different purposes in the culture. Therefore, a text's genre is said to be identified by the sequence of functionally different stages or steps through which it unfolds (Ansari and Babaii, 2004: 5). The major reflex of differences in

genres is the staging structure of texts. These niceties, as noted by Ansari and Babaii (*op.cit.*), are often captured with reference to the Context of Culture (CC) in which the texts are produced.

Genre analysis in the literature has been approached from two perspectives namely; the move analytic approach, proposed by Swales (1981, 1990) and the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) – analytic approach based in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). The present study adopts the GSP analytic procedure.

The Generic Structure Potential (GSP) analytic approach has Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) as its theoretical foundation. The interest in the generic (or schematic) structure of texts has been greatly influenced by Halliday & Hasan (1985); Hasan (1978, 1984, 1996); and Martin (1992). Among the concepts favoured/privileged in SFG are text and context. From these, both the text structure and contextual configuration (CC) are strongly implicated in the GSP – analytical approach. Contextual configuration blends together the values of the three socio-semantic variables of field, tenor and mode to make statements about the structure of a given text and about the social context that generates it. The Contextual Configuration (CC) can predict the following elements of the structure of a text; the obligatory and the optional elements together with the sequencing of these elements. Given the CC of any text, one should be able to generate the potential structure of such text. The potential global rhetorical pattern is what is known as *GSP*. GSP has been described as a condensed statement of the conditions that locate a text within a particular Contextual Configuration (CC). Structure Potential (SP) or Generic Structure Potential (GSP) of a text refers to the total range of optional and obligatory elements of the text and their order (Halliday and Hasan, 1991: 64). Two or more texts that share the same set of obligatory and optional elements and that are embedded in the same contextual configuration (CC) are texts of the same genre (cf. Halliday and Hasan, *op.cit.*). When two texts are closely related to the extent that language is doing the same kind of job in both, they are embedded in the same Contextual Configuration (CC). Two or more texts that are embedded in the same Contextual Configuration (CC) – belong to the same genre may have some differences. These differences, as noted by Halliday and Hasan (*op.cit.*), are those that do not alter the kind of job that language is doing in the two. To illustrate the above explication, Halliday and Hasan (*Ibidem*: 63–65) examine a set of similar spoken texts. They thereafter identify their obligatory and optional rhetorical elements of texts, and establish what they call the GSP of the genre, “Service Encounter” that of a “Shop Transaction” as:

$$[(G). (SI) \wedge] [(SE.) \{SR \wedge SC \wedge\} \wedge S] P \wedge PC (\wedge F)$$

(Culled from Halliday and Hassan, 1991: 64)

A GSP of this type is described as a summarized statement of the conditions under which a text will be seen as one that is appropriate to a Contextual Configuration (CC) of the Service Encounter. Simply put, it is suggested that any shop transaction in English potentially consists of the following macro-structural elements: (i) Greeting (G), (ii) Sale Initiation (S.I), (iii) Sale Enquiry (SE), (iv) Sale Request (SR), (v) Sale Compliance (SC), (vi) Sale (S), (vii) Purchase (P) (viii) Purchase Closure (PC) and (ix) Finis (F). In the above GSP, there are labels for structures and the caret sign indicating sequence. The round brackets in the above GSP indicate optionality of enclosed elements. Therefore, G, SI, SE, and F are optional and SR, SC, S, P and PC are obligatory. The dot (.) between elements indicates more than one option in sequence. Halliday and Hassan (*op.cit.*) point out, however, that optionality of sequence is never equal to complete freedom; the restraint is said to be indicated by the square bracket. Therefore, for example, we can read the first square bracket as follows: G and/or SI may/may not occur; If they both occur, then either G may precede SI, or follow it; Neither G nor SI can follow the elements to the right of SI. The curved arrow shows *iteration*. Thus, (SE.) indicates: SE is optional; SE can occur anywhere, so long as it does not precede G or SI and so long as it does not follow P or PC or F; SE can be iterative. The braces with a curved arrow indicate that the degree of iteration for elements in the square brackets is equal. This means that if SR occurs twice, then SC must also occur twice. Finally, the caret sign (^) shows sequence.

3.2. Interpersonal Metafunction and Mood Structure

Within SFG, choices of meaning are said to be organized into three main components namely; the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions (cf. Eggins and Martin, 1997: 238; Montemayor-Borsinger, 2003: 39). As a theoretical model, SFG emphasizes the relationship between form and function, most especially in relation to the three metafunctions of language, namely; ideational, interpersonal and textual. To be able to read a text, or listen to it effectively and with understanding, Halliday and Hasan (1991: 44) argue that we have to be able to interpret it in terms of all these metafunctions – Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual. Besides, the three metafunctions, the purposes which underlie all language use, have a systematic relationship with the lexicogrammar of a language. Metafunction, according to Halliday and Hasan (1991: 44), means that part of the system of a language- the particular semantic and lexicogrammatical resources- that has developed to perform the function in question. Halliday and Hasan (*op.cit.*) note further that in English (as in every other language), each of

these metafunctions makes a clear and distinctive contribution to the grammar. The three metafunctional categorizations namely; ideational, interpersonal and textual manifest in language use as transitivity, mood and modality. In this study, particular attention shall be paid to the interpersonal metafunction and its realization in mood structure.

Language performs interpersonal function whenever it is used to enable language users (speaker and writer) to participate in communicative acts with other people, to take on roles and to express and understand feelings, attitude and judgments (Bloor and Bloor, 2004). Interpersonal function is concerned with organising the social reality of people we interact with (by making statement; asking questions; giving commands; saying how sure we are; saying how we feel about things) (Egins and Martin, 1997: 239). The interpersonal metafunction is concerned with the interaction between speaker and listener. In other words, the interpersonal macro-function deals with the establishment of social relations and with the participation by the speaker in the speech event in all kinds of personal interaction. It involves the grammatical resources for enacting social roles in general, and speech roles in particular, in dialogic interaction: for example, resources for establishing, changing, and maintaining interpersonal relations. Besides, in interpersonal metafunction, language is a way of acting. It deals with people's use of language to relate to their audience. Kondowe (2014a: 73) notes that when people communicate, they deliver more than just the content or information, they also communicate their role vis-à-vis their partners in the communicative interaction. In English, interpersonal metafunction is realised in many aspects. Among these are mood choices, modal auxiliaries, personal pronouns etc. Here, we shall be dealing with the mood choices. The major grammatical system of the interpersonal metafunction is the system of mood.

The mood system has been described as one of the propositions of functional systemic linguistics. It accounts for the various options that are available to the speaker or writer in the use of language (cf. Osisanwo, 2003). Mood, in the literature, has been examined from the perspectives of grammar and semantics. In giving a grammatical definition of mood, Rodney (1998: 80) sees mood as:

The grammaticalisation of modality. [it] applies to a system of the verb, marked inflectionally or analytically... where just one term, the most elementary, is characteristically used in making assured factual assertions, while the other terms, by contrast are characteristically used.

As noted by Yusuf and Odebunmi (2004: 4), Rodney (1998) locates mood and modality together in an end-means manner. Rodney (*op.cit.*) is also said to have dropped hints on the features and types of mood.

Greenbaum (1999: 58) is equally claimed to have charted a mid-course between grammar and semantics in his definition of mood. According to him,

mood refers to the distinctions in the form of the verb that express the attitude of the speaker to what is being said.

This definition is claimed to have re-echoed Dodd's (1996: 86) systemic definition of the mood system:

This system is bound up with the interpersonal macrofunction of language which has to do with the representation of the speaker's attitude to what is being communicated, roughly whether the speaker sees the uttered as real, desirable, certain.

Dodd's definition above locates mood as a grammatical and semantic concept. It also identifies the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, and the ability of the mood system to create certain impressions in the mind of the hearer.

Several classifications of mood have been made in the literature (e.g.; see Dodd, 1996, *Collins English Grammar*, 1998, Greenbaum, 1999 etc.). These scholars, however, differ in their classifications of declaratives, interrogative, indicative and subjunctive moods.

Greenbaum (1999) has classified mood into: (i) indicative (ii) imperative and (iii) subjunctive mood. By Greenbaum's (*op.cit.*) classification, indicative mood includes three sub-moods namely; declarative, interrogative and exclamatory. Imperative mood is used as a directive in requesting action. Subjunctive mood expresses wishes or conditions that are unlikely to be fulfilled. Subjunctive moods are of two types namely; present and past types.

Given the function of the mood systems in English, Alo (1998: 55) points out that:

The sentence, for example, may be used to approve or disapprove, to express doubt, to ask questions or give answers, to greet, instruct, or to command others; to include others within the social group or to exclude others from it. These various uses or functions of the sentence correspond to grammatical categories which are called declarative (statement sentence): imperative (command, requests) and exclamatory (exclamation).

Mood structures, as argued by Opara (2005), indicate how speakers and listeners, and writers and readers, use language for expressing themselves in verbal exchanges. This implies that in speech or writing,

mood structures reflect interactional or interpersonal meanings. In other words, the speaker or writer can choose between declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences and also decide whether to front the subject or the finite according to the “type of exchange going on, the roles of the participants and attitude and judgment of the speaker.”(cf. Opara, 2005; Bloor and Bloor, 1995; Lipson, 2002). Besides, an author chooses from the mood system of a language to precisely encode his message and attitude in a given discourse. No wonder that Lipson (2002) reviewed in Yeibo (2011: 199) contends that “the mood a speaker or writer chooses plays a critical role in decoding his argument or contention”.

4. Analysis, Findings and Discussion

Given the generic compliant function-based categorisation adopted in this study, our findings reveal that the background information (henceforth, BI) aspects of the abstracts are characterized by five kinds of indicative mood namely; mission indicative mood, premises setting, assumption indicative mood; justification and a few instances of classification mood. However, premises setting mood is observed to be predominant in the data. The preponderance of this mood type in the data (BI aspects) is occasioned by the nature of background information most especially in academic genres as research article abstracts.

BI here deals with a careful and thorough analysis of the subject matter as it is sometimes used to set the tone of an argument. BI also provides readers, most especially interested members of the academic discourse community with the necessary background or context for a research work and motivates the research (cf. Hyland, 2000). As our findings reveal, premises setting moods in BI manifest in form of BI aspects of the abstracts that are used by writers to: (i) give historical background to the study; (ii) define concept(s) that are central to the study at hand; (iii) anchor or state the research objective(s) and (iv) build up arguments against existing (previous) studies with a view to establishing the justification and/ or rationale for the research or study at hand. The extract below is an example of BI where premises setting mood defines concepts that are central to the study.

Ex. 1: *‘Vernacular’ as it is used here, includes the idea of relatively distinct musical communities as well as more fluid networks and scenes. The article exposes the historical basis and problematic nature of style categorizations, and adapts a theoretical model of music production modes that highlights the interconnectedness of various genres and practices of vernacular music (Our Emphasis).*

Source: International Journal of Musical Education, 2004

In the above example, the italicized sentence defines the concept of “vernacular” within the context of the research. It also serves as a premise setting mood that serves as background information for the statement of research objective that follows. Another instance of premise setting mood is resident in the extract below.

Ex. 2: *In 2000, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 called for the increased participation of women in formal political processes surrounding violent conflict. However, worldwide women continue to be a minority in formal politics, particularly in situations of armed violence...* (Our Italics)
Source: Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 43, No. 2. 2009

The sentence in italics in the above example is a premise setting indicative mood (an internal component of BI) that prepares the ground for the argument that follows.

Justification indicative mood is also observed to characterise the background information (BI) aspect of our data but to a varying degree with premise setting mood. An example of justification moods observed in the data is provided below

Ex. 3: ... *I argue that the marketing of nationalism and transnationalism represents contradictory concepts of China as a nation and state...* To some extent, nationalism and transnationalism have become competing sites for ideas about China as a nation and state and how China should deal with a globalised world where the power relation between China and the West is still unequal. (Our Emphasis)
Source: International Journal of Communication, Vol. 2, 2008

In the above example, the author has put up an argument or a justification in promoting the concepts of “nationalism” and transnationalism in relation to China as a nation and state. The presence of this kind of mood in our data (background information) could be said to be due to the requirement that researchers, as dictated or required by the academic discourse community they belong or find themselves, need to justify the relevance or otherwise of their research works to their fields of specializations. By so doing, they are promoting or selling their research works. This corroborates Breeze’s (2009: 12) claim that “in the academic world, abstracts perform a major promotional function, that of “selling” the paper in question to a conference or to a journal”. On this promotional function, Swales and Feak (2003: 39) equally point out that:

Abstracts across a wide range of academic disciplines need to project ‘interestingness’ and a ‘convincing and authoritative image’ in order to persuade readers of their relevance.

Mission indicative moods that are observed in our data (BI aspects of the abstracts) are employed by the writers to unveil their research

objectives. Below is an example of mission indicative moods observed in the data.

Ex. 4: *This essay examines a series of online narrative by a group of Chinese TV professionals. Through their eyes, this analysis seeks to reveal the impact of commercialization...* (Emphasis mine)

Source: International Journal of Communication, Vol. 2, 2008

In the above highlighted or italicized sentence, the verb, ‘examines’ betrays the research mission (i.e. objective or research goal). Other instances of mission indicative mood in the data are also observed to have been couched by the writers using lexical verbs such as ‘examines’, ‘analyses’, ‘focuses on’, ‘studies’, ‘outlines’, ‘argues’, ‘presents’, ‘investigates’, ‘explores’, etc. which Cava (2010: 24) dubs “research process words”.

As revealed by the generic convention of research abstract writing, mission indicative mood is found to be the generic characteristic of Statement of Objectives (SO) as it is used in stating the researchers’ specific research missions. However, apart from its use in stating research mission, the presence of mission indicative moods in the BI aspects of the abstracts equally serves to provide a preliminary information on the research focus before the writers (researchers) thereafter present the research objectives. We can consider the example below.

Ex. 5: *This paper introduces a set of methods that have been used to capture attitudes and opinions in a conflict environment. Based on an ongoing project in Dafur, it details the two streams of research: one developed to carry out interviews on the ground to allow people to frame key issues using their own language and world views; and the other, to keep contact with the formation of opinions from a distance, particularly when the security situation or other obstacles prevent the researchers from being in the field...* The result of...

Source: International Journal of Communication, Vol. 2, 2008

The information in italics above is a preliminary background information for the research objectives that is later stated as the last sentence of the abstract.

Another generic compliant function-based kind of mood found to characterize the BI aspect of the abstracts is assumption mood. As our data reveal, the writers of the abstracts (scholars) often make assumptions which manifest in form of research hypotheses which are later confirmed to be true or not in the course of their main or entire research works. The example below can be considered

Ex. 6: *Different parental socialization practices tend to predict the academic behaviours of European and Asian Canadian adolescents*. This study explored the processes whereby parental socialization practices lead to Fillipino adolescents' school involvement... (Our Emphasis)

Source: Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal, 2001

In the above example, the writer (author) makes an assumption (claim) concerning the “academic behaviours of European and Asian – Canadian adolescents”. Given the nature of the research genre and the context of the abstracts, the outcome of the study is expected to confirm the validity or otherwise of the assumption made. Several other instances of this mood type abound in the data. We can consider another instance of assumption mood in the extract below.

Ex. 7: *Public relations is politically and economically more important than ever*. This article charts the growth of the PR industry in Britain since 1979.(Our Emphasis)

Source: International Communication Gazette

The italicized portion in the above example is an assumption which stands to be ‘empirically’ confirmed to be true or not in the course of the research. As we have implicitly stated earlier on, assumptions in academic genres, most especially in research article abstracts, are analogous to hypothesis formulation, hypothesis being a tentative statement awaiting confirmation or rejection through careful research activities (cf. Olorunjoba-Oju, 1996: 158). Few instances of classification mood are found in the data.

5. Conclusion

The foregoing has explored the mood choices and functions in Background Information (BI) segments of the arts-based research article abstracts. Our analysis has been made in respect of the generic compliant functions that mood structures are used to perform in the context of the generic structural elements of the BI. Five kinds of indicative mood structures, namely, mission indicative mood, premises setting, assumption indicative mood; justification and a few instances of classification mood are found to characterise the BI segments of the abstracts. However, premises setting mood structures are observed to be predominantly used in the data. The preponderance of this mood type in the data (BI aspects) is occasioned by the nature of background information most especially in academic genres as research article abstracts. Premises setting moods in BI are found to have been used by writers to: (i) give historical background to the study; (ii) define concept(s) that are central to the study at hand; (iii) anchor or state the research objective(s) and (iv) build up arguments against existing

(previous) studies with a view to establishing the justification and/ or rationale for the research or study at hand.

This study argues that having the knowledge of the mood choices in BI aspects of the abstracts and their generic-compliant functions has significance of assisting academics in writing better and acceptable background information and, by extension, better abstracts suitable either for conferences or articles meant for publication in learned journals. This study also has the discourse value of enhancing academic discourse pedagogy and skills. Apart from complementing the existing works in research discourse in general and research article abstracts in particular, the present study has provided useful insights into the discourse functions of mood choices in Background Information (BI) segment of the arts-based research article abstracts. It equally has the merit of orienting new entrant members of academic discourse community of arts literacy with the knowledge of genre literacy, that is, “awareness of how genre functions and the generic conventions of research article abstracts” (cf. Motta-Roth, 1999: 94). The study concludes that an understanding of mood choices and their generic compliant functions will impact positively on the writing of Background Information (BI) in abstracts, especially by budding academics.

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