

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework Sections in the Thesis Defense Presentation Slides: Their Rhetorical Structure by Chinese English-majored Master’s Students

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Article information	Abstract
<p>Article history: Received: 24 May 2024 Last revised: 5 Feb 2026 Accepted: 14 Feb 2026 Available online: 20 Feb 2026</p>	<p><i>This study aims to investigate the rhetorical structure of the Literature Review (LR) section and the newly observed Theoretical Framework (TF) section in thesis defense presentation slides (TDPS) written by Chinese English-majored master’s students. A further purpose is to examine whether these two adjacent sections share the same communicative functions. In the corpus of 20 TDPSs, eight LR sections, and eight TF sections were discovered and collected as data for the present study. Through move analysis using Chen and Kuo’s (2012) framework, four moves and seven steps were identified in the LR sections, whereas for the TF sections, four moves and three steps were found. Moreover, our findings confirmed that these two sections share similar communicative purposes, namely, to establish the territory of one’s research and to indicate the niche, both of which reveal how the niche is occupied. Nevertheless, the variations in terms of the status of certain moves and steps identified lead to a conclusion that these two sections place the emphasis on different communicative functions. Based on the findings, pedagogical implications for the production of the TDPS genre are provided.</i></p>
<p>Keywords: Rhetorical structure Thesis defense presentation slides Literature review Theoretical framework Chinese writers</p>	

INTRODUCTION

The thesis defense is an essential part of graduate education, representing the summative achievement for master’s students (Liu & Liu, 2021). The students are to present their thesis in “the defense proper” session of the thesis defense (Swales, 2004). The presentation of the conducted research is an essential component in the pursuit of the master’s while allowing a wider readership (Ivanova et al., 2023). To present the thesis, PowerPoint slides are almost universally employed to support the oral commentary of the students (Liu & Liu, 2021; Pieketaleyee & Barzargani, 2018). Given its pervasiveness, the thesis defense presentation slides (TDPSs) are a significant and unique genre (Tardy, 2009) that the students are required to master. The main communicative purposes of the TDPS are not only to organize the components of the oral commentary but also to support the delivery of the oral presentation

(Dubois, 1980; Schoeneborn, 2013; Weissberg, 1993; Yates & Orlikowski, 2007). Moreover, the intended audience is the committee members, the supervisors, fellow students, and faculty members.

Previous studies on the rhetorical structure of other academic genres, such as research articles (e.g., Lim, 2006; Swales, 1990) and theses or dissertations (e.g., Chen & Kuo, 2012; Kwan, 2006), provide abundant insights into the teaching and learning of these genres. Research on presentation slides and the text of the PowerPoints indicates that more attention has been paid to presentations at academic conferences. To illustrate, Atai and Talebzadeh (2012) investigated the moves and steps adopted in conference presentation slides, employing Swales's CARS model (1990). In the same vein, Diani (2015) investigated the rhetorical structure of conference presentation slides produced by both native and non-native English speakers. In addition, Lin (2020) paid attention to the oral thesis defense and studied the pragmatic force modifiers adopted by master's students. However, studies on TDPS have been scarce. Since students receive little or no instruction on composing slides (Tardy, 2009) or TDPS, exploring the rhetorical structure of TDPS is essential to better equip them with sufficient genre knowledge. As Ren and Li (2011) suggest, explicitly teaching writing knowledge to less experienced writers can help them produce that genre more effectively.

As TDPSs are the slides students compose to use in their thesis defense, the content on these slides is selected and transferred from the original theses that successfully passed the oral defense. An interesting feature of this set of TDPSs is that they include the Literature Review (LR) section and a separate section commonly referred to as the Theoretical Framework (TF). These sections are transferred from the original theses, where the TF was positioned as a chapter between the LR chapter and the Methodology chapter. As for the goals of an LR, Schryen et al. (2020) categorized them as synthesizing, aggregating evidence, criticizing, theory building, identifying research gaps, and developing a research agenda. Furthermore, Cram et al. (2020) pointed out that the purpose of the LR is to depict, explain, or analyze constructs and to describe theories related to a specific topic. Thus, it seems that the TF section may fulfill the goal of theory-building or describing the LR. Kwan (2006) considered all the sections between the Introduction chapter and the Methodology chapter in the dissertations as the LR. LR writing is challenging for students (Dugartsyrenova, 2024; Zhao & Li, 2023). Nevertheless, there is a paucity of studies investigating the rhetorical structure of the LR section and the TDPS produced by Chinese writers. Furthermore, it seems that TF has never been addressed before, either in the thesis or in the TDPS.

Therefore, the current research aims to 1) investigate the moves and steps of these two adjacent components of the TDPS and also to 2) find out if these two are relevant and share common communicative purposes. The main aim of this study is thus to test if TF can be regarded as a variation of LR in this genre of TDPS. It is worth noting that this study is part of a larger project examining a corpus of master's theses and their corresponding TDPSs collected from a Chinese university. The project aims to explore the rhetorical structures of these two genres and the strategies used to transfer content and structure between them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous genre studies on the TDPS

Research on TDPS is scant, especially on its rhetorical structure. Moreover, within the rhetorical structure of the TDPS, the Literature Review (LR) plays an essential role since it shows how the writer's study is connected to the wider academic field and a place where the writer persuades the reader of the novelty and contribution of their study to the target audience. Hence, as a sub-genre of the TDPS genre, the effective preparation of the LR section strengthens the contribution of the whole study. For novice writers like master's students, move analysis helps them gain a deeper understanding of the components of a genre, helping them organize and express their thoughts more effectively (Kuzmenkova & Erykina, 2022). However, to the best of our knowledge, only one study has investigated the moves of the LR section of the TDPS, i.e., Pieketaleyee and Bazargani (2018). Collecting 50 TDPSs produced by Iranian master's students in Language Teaching in their viva sessions, Pieketaleyee and Barzargani (2018) observed that all the TDPSs followed the structure of the traditional type of the thesis, i.e., Introduction-Literature review-Methods-Results-Discussion-Conclusion (ILrMRDC). Furthermore, adopting Chen and Kuo's (2012) move-step framework for a thesis, they analyzed the Introduction and LR sections in the TDPSs. It should be mentioned that the present study focuses on the LR section and the newly found TF section in the TDPSs produced by the Chinese students. Thus, only the results of the LR section in their study were reviewed. Classifying moves or steps with over 50% occurrence as conventional and those below 50% as optional, they found that only the three steps of Move 1, *Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research*, were considered conventional in this section, while the remaining moves and steps were optional. No new moves and steps were identified in their study. Their findings suggest that the framework used for the original thesis could also be applied to investigate the corresponding TDPS. Nevertheless, their study was limited to the Iranian writers. Therefore, the present investigation, which concentrates on Chinese writers, could provide further insights into the development of this genre.

To position the current study into the wider field, previous studies that explored related or similar genres to TDPS should be reviewed here as well. To illustrate, Kwan (2006) provided a detailed analysis of the rhetorical moves within LR chapters of PhD dissertations, revealing that compared with Introductions, LRs have a distinct structure, particularly in their recursive move patterns and the less frequent appearance of Move 3, *Announcing one's own research*. Compared with Kwan's study (2006), Pieketaleyee and Barzargani (2018) found fewer moves and steps in the presentation slides of the LRs, which were produced based on the content of the original theses. This difference may be caused by the limited time for the delivery of the presentation slides. Additionally, several studies have investigated the moves and steps of other presentation genres, such as 3-mins presentations (Hu & Liu, 2018) and conference presentation slides (Atai & Talebzadeh, 2014; Diani, 2015). However, the LR section of the TDPS is not within their scope. From the above, it can be the case that the writers have limited genre knowledge about the LR, a vital place to outline their theoretical landscape of the TDPS genre. Therefore, our findings on the LR and the TF sections are expected to add more insights into the existing understanding of this relatively underexplored genre of TDPS.

Genre and move analysis

In the present article, the concept of genre and its analysis following the school of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) is adopted. From the ESP perspective, genre is a successful communicative event shaped by the communicative purpose shared or recognized by members of a discourse community (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). In the case of the TDPS, the discourse community involves multiple members, including the writers, i.e., the master's students, the supervisors, the committee members, and others who are interested in this genre.

Moreover, shaped by common communicative purposes, one genre often possesses schematic or rhetorical structure to realize these purposes (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990), which are achieved by a sequence of moves and steps. Moves are text segments or units serving specific communicative functions that contribute to the fulfillment of the ultimate communicative purposes of that genre (Swales, 1990; You & Li, 2021). Moreover, each move can be constituted by one or more sub-moves or steps to achieve its functions. To identify the rhetorical structure of a genre, move analysis is constantly employed by previous studies (e.g., Chen & Kuo, 2012; Parkinson, 2017; Swales, 1990). It is an essential and valuable approach for genre-based writing (Parkinson, 2017). Through the exploration of moves and steps, writers could understand the components and communicative purposes of a particular genre, thus enhancing their genre knowledge and writing ability (Kuzmenkova & Erykina, 2022). In addition, a comparison of the moves and steps elucidates the communicative purposes of different genres, which is effective and helpful in addressing the second objective of this current study.

METHODOLOGY

Materials

The corpus of the current study contains 20 TDPSs collected from a comprehensive university, which offers a wide range of disciplines and academic programs, in the southwest of China. These 20 TDPSs were corresponding texts to their original 20 master's theses where they were drawn from, with the ILrMRDC structure, produced by the master's students in Applied Linguistics from the academic years 2017 to 2021, to capture the prevailing trends and identify the recurring rhetorical patterns within the TDPSs in this context. Since this current study can be the first attempt at analyzing the TDPS, our findings on this relatively small corpus of 20 texts can be useful for paving the way for further investigations of this genre in the future. Among the 20 original theses, 12 chapters titled Theoretical Framework were newly found. Out of the pool of the corresponding 20 TDPSs, which were assigned as TDPS01 to TDPS20, only eight LR sections and eight TF sections were identified, respectively. It is assumed that every TDPS should demonstrate all the sections of the original thesis. However, this assumption is not true in our authentic data. Thus, it is worth exploring more about this genre. These LR sections and TF sections were assigned codes for the analysis according to their original TDPSs. For example, the LR section of TDPS02 was assigned as LR02.

Analytical framework

Currently, there is no established framework suitable for analyzing the TDPS genre since it is underexplored. Hence, following Pieketaleyee and Bazargani (2018), Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework was adopted to analyze our collected data. Their framework is for the whole thesis, including the chapters of Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, and Discussion. The rationale for the adoption of this framework is that the TDPS is a corresponding genre of the thesis which contains the contents from it. Thus, it is assumed that the framework for analyzing the thesis can apply to the investigation of the TDPS. Therefore, the moves and steps of the LR chapter were selected to analyze the rhetorical structure of the LR sections of the TDPS. As for the TF section, it is a new section that has not yet been reported on and or discussed in previous studies. At the same time, its original TF chapter, which is placed between the LR chapter and the Methodology chapter, was also absent in other reports. Nevertheless, in an informal interview with one of the thesis supervisors at this university, who has been working for 12 years, revealed that the TF chapter is a part of the LR, and it could be separated when the writers consider that more attention needs to be attached to the theories adopted by their studies. This consideration is consistent with the study of the moves and steps of the LR chapters by Kwan (2006), who regarded all the chapters between Introduction and Methodology as LR. Hence, we intend to test if the framework for the LR section could also apply to the exploration of the TF section. The detailed framework for the analysis is provided in Table 1.

Table1

Move-step framework for literature review (adapted from Chen & Kuo, 2012, pp. 48–49)

Moves	Steps
Introduction	Indicating organization of the review chapter(s) and justifying the themes (areas) to be reviewed
	Body part (each thematic unit)
Move 1: Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research by	a) Surveying the non-research-related phenomena or knowledge claims b) Claiming centrality c) Surveying the research-related phenomena
Move 2: Creating a research niche	a) Counter-claiming (weaknesses and problems) b) Gap-indicating (paucity or scarcity) c) Asserting confirmative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed d) Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims to one's own research e) Abstracting or synthesizing knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position or a theoretical framework f) Concluding a part of literature review and/or indicating transition to review of a different area
Move 3: Occupying the research niche by	a) Indicating research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses b) Indicating theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks c) Indicating research design/processes d) Interpreting terminology used in the thesis
Conclusion	Providing a summary of the review of the themes and relating the review to the present study

Note. New move or step identified and proposed by Chen and Kuo is in bold.

This framework was originally proposed by Kwan (2006) and later adapted by Chen and Kuo (2012). They added a new step, i.e., *Concluding a part of literature review and/or indicating transition to review of a different area*, under Move 2. From the investigation of the LR chapters, both Chen and Kuo (2012) and Kwan (2006) found that the LR chapters were structured as Introduction-Body-Conclusion, with several thematic units in the Body part. Moreover, each thematic unit could contain three moves.

Data analysis

The framework shown in Table 1 was employed to analyze the moves and steps of the LR sections and the TF sections. To identify the moves and steps, a functional approach to textual analysis was adopted, by which only the researcher's cognitive judgment on the communicative functions of a text segment and the textual boundaries is referred to (Kwan, 2006). This approach aligns with the definition of a move, which is a text segment serving a local purpose and simultaneously advancing the text's overarching rhetorical purpose. In the case of more than one communicative function revealed in one text segment, only the salient function was coded (You & Li, 2021). As for the status of the moves and steps, if their frequency is 100%, they would be regarded as obligatory. Those between 60% and 99% were conventional, and those below 60% were optional, following the criteria by Kanoksilapatham (2005). In the original thesis, the LR section was found to have an Introduction-Body-Conclusion structure (Chen & Kuo, 2012; Kwan, 2006), and the Body part is composed of several thematic units. However, in the process of data coding of the TDPS, the thematic units in the Body part were difficult to identify in a clearly demonstrated manner as in the original thesis. Therefore, following Pieketaleyee and Bazargani (2018), the present study considered the LR as a whole unit and the Introduction and the Conclusion parts of the LR as two moves. Furthermore, to verify and add more insight into the textual analysis, semi-structured interviews, which contained questions formulated from the findings of the textual analysis, were conducted with two supervisors and five students who wrote the TDPSs from each academic year.

Moreover, the coding of the moves and steps is not without subjectivity (Soler-Monreal, 2015). Thus, an inter-coder holding an master's degree with experience in corpus analysis was invited to code 30% of the total data with the first author of the current paper, following the tradition of genre analysis (e.g., Liu & Buckingham, 2018). To calculate the inter-coder agreement, a percent agreement was adopted (Rau & Shih, 2021). The formula for the calculation is $A/(A+D) * 100$, where A is the number of agreements, and D is the number of disagreements (Dastjerdi et al., 2017). The inter-coder agreement between these two coders for the LR section and the TF section was 91.5% and 93.1%, respectively, which indicates a high consistency in the coding.

RESULTS

Moves and steps of the LR sections

The LR sections of the TDPS included in the analysis consisted of 25 slides in total, ranging from one to six for each TDPS set, with an average of three slides per LR. As for the moves in

the eight LR sections, four out of the five moves in the analysis framework were identified, as shown in Table 2.

To be specific, the *Introduction* move whose function is to provide the outline of the LR and Move 1 *Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research* were found in five LR sections, with a frequency of 62.5%, suggesting their conventional status. Among these five LRs, only three present as a list the themes to be reviewed in their studies, as shown in Figure 1. Moreover, the *Introduction* move in the other two LR sections was observed in the slide that was employed as a boundary device, as presented in Figure 2.

Furthermore, Move 2 *Creating a research niche* and Move 3 *Occupying the research niche* were identified to be optional, with a frequency of 37.5% and 50%, respectively. In addition, the *Conclusion* move was absent in these LR sections.

Table 2
Moves and steps identified in the LR sections and the TF sections

Move	No. of LRs	Status	No. of TFs	Status
Introduction	5 (62.5%)	Con.	1 (12.5%)	Opt.
Move 1 Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research	5 (62.5%)	Con.	3 (37.5%)	Opt.
S1 Surveying the non-research-related phenomena or knowledge claim	5 (62.5%)	Con.	3 (37.5%)	Opt.
S2 Claiming centrality	0	/	0	/
S3 Surveying the research-related phenomena	3 (37.5%)	Opt.	0	/
Move 2 Creating a research niche	3 (37.5%)	Opt.	1 (12.5%)	Opt.
S1 Counter-claiming	0	/	1 (12.5%)	Opt.
S2 Gap-indicating	3 (37.5%)	Opt.	0	/
S3 Asserting confirmative claims	0	/	0	/
S4 Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims	0	/	0	/
S5 Abstracting or synthesizing knowledge claims	1 (12.5%)	Opt.	0	/
S6 Concluding a part of literature review and/or	0	/	0	/
Move 3 Occupying the research niche	4 (50%)	Opt.	8 (100%)	Obl.
S1 Indicating research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses	0	/	0	/
S2 Indicating theoretical positions/theoretical framework	2 (25%)	Opt.	8 (100%)	Obl.
S3 Indicating research design/processes	1 (12.5%)	Opt.	0	/
S4 Interpreting terminology used in the thesis	1 (12.5%)	Opt.	0	/
Conclusion	0	/	0	/

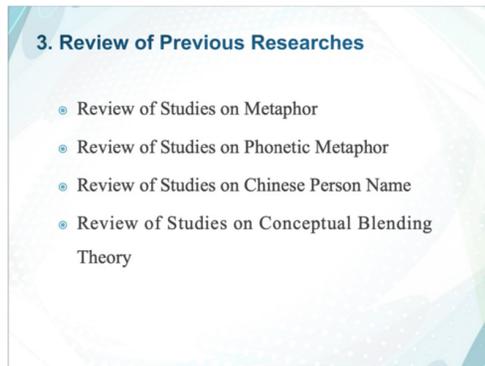


Figure 1 Example of the *Introduction* move (LR03)

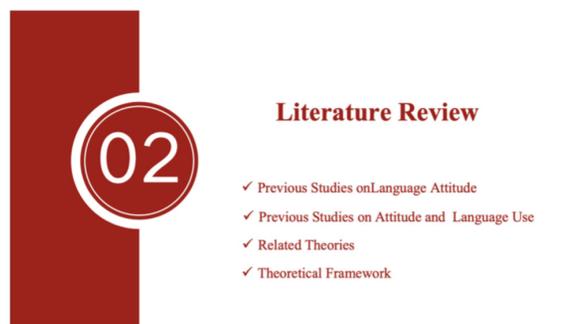


Figure 2 Example of the *Introduction* move at the boundary device (LR16)

Regarding the steps, except for the *Introduction* move and the *Conclusion* move, the remaining three moves contained step options. For the realization of Move 1, S1, *Surveying the non-research-related phenomena* was observed in five LR sections (62.5%), indicating it is a conventional step. On the other hand, S3 *Surveying the research-related phenomena* was found to be optional with a frequency of 37.5%, and S2 *Claiming centrality* was not identified in the present corpus.

About the realization of Move 2, six steps are available according to the framework of Chen and Kuo (2012). Nevertheless, only two of them were found in the eight LR sections. S2 *Gap-indicating* was identified in three LR sections (37.5%), and S5 *Abstracting or synthesizing knowledge claims* was observed in only one LR section (12.5%). Both of these two steps were therefore optional.

In terms of the steps of Move 3, S1, *Indicating research aims, focuses, research questions, or hypotheses* was absent in the present corpus. The other three steps, i.e., S2 *Indicating theoretical positions*, S3 *Indicating research design*, and S4 *Interpreting terminology used in the thesis*, were identified with a rather low frequency of 25%, 12.5%, and 12.5%, respectively, which makes all of them optional.

In a nutshell, four out of the five moves were found. Nonetheless, no obligatory move was identified. Only the *Introduction* move and Move 1 were conventional. Among the 13 steps of

the moves, only S1 *Surveying the non-research-related phenomena* was conventional, seven were not employed, and the rest were all optional.

Moves and steps of the TF sections

In total, there were 19 slides in the eight TF sections, with a range of one to four slides, averaging two slides per TF. The same framework was utilized to investigate the moves and steps of these eight TF sections. During the process of data coding, it was challenging to identify the communicative function of certain slides since no linguistic signal was clearly offered. To illustrate, as displayed in Figure 3, the content could function as an introduction to a theory (M1S1) or as an indication of the theoretical framework adopted by that study (M3S2). The solution to this uncertainty was to find out the text in the original thesis to see which move it belongs to or to consult the actual writer about its exact communicative function.

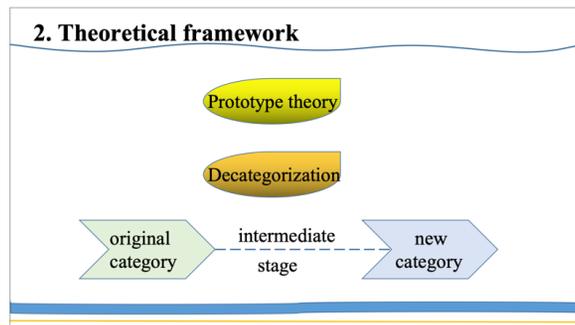


Figure 3 Example of the uncertainty of the move identification (TF01)

As shown in Table 2, the first three moves were found to have a frequency of 12.5%, 37.5%, and 12.5%, respectively, which suggests that these three moves were all optional. The slightly more presence of Move 1 implies that it is acceptable to delay establishing a territory of one's own research in the TF rather than in the preceding LR. Furthermore, Move 3 *Occupying the research niche* was identified in all the TF sections (100%), indicating it was an obligatory move. In addition, the last move, *Conclusion* was not present in the present corpus, similar to that in the LR sections.

Moreover, regarding the 13 steps under Move 1 to Move 3, only three of them were used in the eight TF sections. Specifically, in the instances of Move 1, merely S1 *Surveying the non-research-related phenomena* was identified with a frequency of 37.5%, giving it the optional status in the corpus. Additionally, in the instances of Move 2, it was found that this move was realized by S1 *Counter-claiming*, which was optional since only one instance was observed. Furthermore, to realize Move 3, only one out of the four steps was identified, i.e., S2 *Indicating theoretical position/theoretical framework*. This step was found in all the TF sections (100%); thus, it was obligatory.

To conclude, in the TF sections, only Move 3 was found to be obligatory, and no conventional moves were identified. Moreover, for the realization of Moves 1 to 3, only one step was observed for each move. Among the identified steps, M3S2 was obligatory, whereas the other two were optional.

Similarities and differences between the LR sections and the TF sections

One of the research objectives of the current paper is to explore whether the LR section and the TF section share common communicative functions. Through the move and step identification of these two adjacent sections, it was found that the framework for the LR section was also adequately and appropriately applicable to the TF section. No new moves or steps were observed. The first four moves were found in both the LR sections and the TF sections. Additionally, the last move, Conclusion was absent in both sections.

The Introduction move was conventional in the LR sections, while it was optional in the TF sections since only one instance was found. Similarly, Move 1 was found to be conventional in the LRs, whereas it was optional in the TFs. Move 2 was observed to be optional in both sections. Furthermore, Move 3 was optional in the LRs with a frequency of 50%. However, Move 3 was found in every TF section, 100% frequency, and it was an obligatory move.

In terms of the steps, two steps, i.e., M1S1 and M1S3, were employed to achieve Move 1 in the LRs. Nevertheless, only M1S1 was found in the TF sections. Moreover, for the realization of Move 2 in the LRs, only M2S2 was identified, whereas in the TFs, only M2S1 was found. The status of these two steps was the same, both being optional. In addition, to realize Move 3, three out of the four steps were observed in the LRs, i.e., M3S2, M3S3, and M3S4. All these three identified steps of Move 3 were optional. Nonetheless, in the TFs, only M3S2 was found, and it was obligatory. The other two steps observed in the LRs were absent in the TFs.

DISCUSSION

Rhetorical structure of the LR section

In the pool of the collected 20 TDPSs, only eight of them contained an LR section, which is inconsistent with that of Pieketaleyee and Bazargani (2018), who found that all the 50 TDPSs in their corpus included the LR section. This difference may be ascribed to the various conventions established in different institutions. However, master's students in the current discourse community had not received any formal instruction on creating the TDPS, yet their supervisors assumed that they were competent to do so. Thus, the convention in this community was determined by the master's students themselves rather than by being taught or by a prescribed format. This result allows us to assume that the LR section might not always be necessary or expected by the audience in the present discourse community, thus resulting in its optional status.

As for the moves, the finding of the *Introduction* move being conventional is not in line with that of Pieketaleyee and Bazargani (2018), in which this move was merely identified in 20% of their corpus and thus being optional. A possible explanation is that writers in the present discourse community considered it essential to indicate the organization or the themes being reviewed in their studies, enabling the audience to clearly understand the content of this section. The interviews with the two supervisor informants, who were the target audience of

the TDPS, found different perspectives related to this advanced indication of the section structure. One of the informants regarded that it was not necessary to provide the section outline except for the whole outline at the beginning of the presentation. The other informant shared an opinion that it is good to have this section introduction since it makes the organization clearer for the audience, providing an advanced overview and comprehension of the section. These insights demonstrate that the audience has different opinions on the section introduction. Further studies, thus, are needed to investigate if an advanced introduction to the section is necessary from the audience's perspective.

Furthermore, the results of Move 1 being conventional as well as of Move 2 and Move 3 being optional show that the writers prefer to establish the territory rather than to create a niche and occupy the niche when demonstrating the literature review content in the slides. It is confirmed by the interviews with the students that creating a niche and occupying the niche were not always necessary since these two moves might also be found in other sections, such as the Introduction section, the TF section, and the Methodology section. The preference of Move 1 over Move 2 and Move 3 might be because the writers can maintain directness and clarity in their presentations. Overly complex arguments or extensive discussions on niche creation and occupation might complicate the message, especially in presentation formats like PowerPoint, where brevity and focus are key. This finding suggests that a strong emphasis on establishing the research territory is more important than detailed niche creation and occupation in the literature review stage in the present discourse community.

In terms of the realization of Move 1, *S1 Surveying the non-research-related phenomena or knowledge claims* was found to be conventional, which accords with that of Pieketaleyee and Bazargani (2018). Providing theoretical information or knowledge seems important for the writers to establish the territory in this specific genre. In addition, *S2 Claiming centrality* was not identified in the present sub-corpus, which disagrees with Pieketaleyee and Bazargani's (2018) study in which S2 had a frequency of 75% in their corpus. It seems that writers in the current discourse community were less inclined to claim the importance of the theme. It might be because the writers think it is not vital to explicitly present the importance of the slides given their limited space since it can be delivered by the oral commentary. Besides, the centrality of the theme could have already been claimed in the preceding Introduction section of the slides. Moreover, the optional status of *S3 Surveying the research-related phenomena* found in the current corpus could be explained by the fact that merely 15 minutes at maximum were assigned to each student for the presentation in the current context. Thus, mentioning specific studies in the literature could occupy a significant amount of oral presentation time, so M1S3 is not commonly presented. To sum up, to realize Move 1 in the slides, the writers preferred to show their familiarity with the theories or concepts rather than summarize the related findings from previous studies.

Regarding the realization of Move 2, which was found to be optional, only S2 and S5 were identified, and both were optional. Similarly, all the steps employed to achieve Move 3 were also optional. These findings indicate that these steps were not preferred by the writers, which could be inferred that they are not necessary for the realization of the communicative functions of the TDPS. Moreover, it seems that the writers have the agency to choose the most effective

way to convey their research, which can lead to more nuanced and contextually appropriate presentations. Our text-based findings thus could serve as a starting point for further studies on this required but less explored genre of TDPS in the genre set of postgraduate study, especially from the perspectives of those creators of the genre.

Additionally, the absence of the *Conclusion* move is similar to Pieketaleyee and Bazargani (2018), in which this move was optional with a rather low frequency of 15%. This could be attributed to the characteristic of the presentation slide genre that is delivered to a live audience with a commentary in which the writers could briefly present a conclusion that had just been reviewed. Moreover, the LR section in the TDPS was rather brief and succinct. Thus, it is not necessary to provide a summary of the content being displayed in around three slides.

Rhetorical structure of the TF Section

In the same vein, merely eight TF sections were found in the pool of 20 TDPSs, which indicates that providing information related to the theoretical framework is not the main communicative purpose during the defense session. It aligns with Hu and Liu's (2018) study of three-minute thesis presentations, a similar genre of the TDPS, in which *Framework*, aiming to demonstrate a theoretical position or framework serving as a basis for the writer's research, was an optional move.

Concerning the moves, one instance of the *Introduction* move was identified, in which the writer informed what was to be presented in the following slides in this section in a smaller font under the section heading. Nonetheless, it might not be expected by the audience because only two slides were included in this section, and it could be easy for the audience to comprehend already.

Moreover, Move 1 and Move 2 were both optional. Move 3 was the only obligatory move. These results reveal that the predominant communicative purpose of this TF section in the slides was to announce one's own study and demonstrate how the writer occupied the research niche he/she has already established. The predominance of communicating their research focus in this section suggests it might be particularly effective in settings where time is limited, such as conferences or thesis defenses, ensuring that the core of the research is clearly articulated.

Furthermore, Move 1 was mainly realized by S1 which was observed to be optional. The other two steps were not found in the slides, suggesting that they may not serve as communicative functions of the TF sections. Similarly, Move 2 was achieved only through S1, and with just one instance. This very small number of occurrence identified leads us to assume that Move 2 and its related steps were not anticipated by the audience in this TF section. This could be explained by the possibility that the research niche had already been addressed in the Introduction or the LR section, as indicated by interviews with the students. Regarding the realization of Move 3, only S2 *Indicating theoretical position/theoretical framework* was identified, and it was deemed obligatory. This finding reveals that in the TF sections, the framework that serves as a theoretical basis of the study is an essential option to occupy the

research niche. Therefore, it is suggested that the writers need to explicitly provide the theoretical framework they adopted for their study when they include a TF section in the TDPS. It can be concluded that the main communicative purpose of the TF section is to show the theoretical framework adopted by the writers to conduct their study, as manifested by the section heading “Theoretical Framework”.

From the above results, we learn that the framework of Chen and Kuo (2012) may not be effectively used to analyze and explain the moves and steps in the condensed and much shorter text found on PowerPoint presentation slides since most steps were found to be optional or absent. The possible explanation for this could be that little attention has been attached to the importance of the TDPS genre, and master’s students in the present study received limited instruction on its production. Thus, a convention for producing this genre has not been established in the present discourse community. Another factor may be attributed to the small sample size found in the current study, which encourages further studies with a larger corpus to explore the established conventions for the TDPS.

Comparison of the LR sections and the TF sections

Through the comparison of the rhetorical structure of the LR section and the TF section, it was found that these two sections share common communicative functions as the same moves and steps were identified in both sections, and no new moves or steps were found in the TF section. Nevertheless, the status of certain moves in these two sections varied. To be specific, the *Introduction* move and Move 1 were conventional in the LR sections, whereas they were optional in the TF sections. Furthermore, Move 3, which was optional in the LR sections, was obligatory in the TF sections. These results demonstrate that the LR section aims to introduce the themes being reviewed in this section and to establish the territory of one’s research. On the other hand, the TF section that follows focuses more on the occupation of the research niche already established, especially the indication of the theoretical framework employed in the writer’s study.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study investigated the rhetorical structure of two adjacent elements of the TDPS, i.e., the LR section and the TF section, and then examined whether these two sections share the same communicative functions. As for the LR section, four moves and seven steps were identified. Apart from the two moves and the one step being conventional, the rest of them were optional. It can be drawn that no fixed convention is established in the present discourse community to compose an LR section. In terms of the TF section, four moves and three steps were found. Among them, aside from Move 3, *Occupying the research niche, and its step, Indicating the theoretical position/theoretical framework*, being obligatory, the remaining moves and steps were all optional. Therefore, it seems that the main communicative purpose of the TF section is to explicitly demonstrate the theoretical framework employed in the writer’s study. Moreover, the finding that the LR section and the TF section share the same communicative functions confirms Kwan’s (2006) argument for regarding the chapters between the Introduction and the Methodology as elements possessing quality and characteristics of Literature Review.

The investigation of the underexplored genre TDPS could provide certain pedagogical implications. Most important of all, it could raise the students' awareness of this particular genre which they need to master in their learning discipline. Moreover, the supervisors or the instructors may not pay due attention to the preparation of the TDPS since the interviews with the students reveal that they received no instruction on it. The current study, to a certain degree, therefore, can increase the attention of the supervisors and instructors to pay to this genre. The findings of the rhetorical structure of the LR section and the TF section might provide insights for the students to produce these two sections of the TDPS. To illustrate, when producing the LR section, it is suggested to include Move 1, *Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research*, to make it more effective since this move was found conventional. Moreover, for the composition of the TF section, it is essential to contain Move 3, *Occupying the research niche*, especially its step, *Indicating the theoretical position/theoretical framework*. For the other optional moves or steps, the students could select to present them based on the communicative purposes they prefer to exhibit in their TDPS.

It should be mentioned that this current paper is not without limitations. One limitation of the present study is that the sample size of the data was rather small, thus, the findings could not be generalized to a larger context. Nevertheless, further studies that include a larger sample size could be beneficial for the confirmation of the current findings and could increase our comprehension of these two elements of the TDPS.

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