

Shell Nouns on the Move: Expert and L2 Student Abstracts in Applied Linguistics

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Abstract

Shell nouns perform rhetorical functions of encapsulating propositions in text, reiterating the encapsulated propositions, and signaling macro-textual structures, which enhances overall coherence of texts. The aim of the study is to describe distribution and rhetorical functions of shell nouns in abstracts of research articles in applied linguistics. Two corpora were compiled from 20 journal abstracts of experts and 20 proceedings abstracts of L2 students. To analyze shell nouns from a macro-textual perspective, all abstracts were tagged with moves of communicative acts (Background-Purpose-Method-Results-Conclusion of studies). Results indicated the experts frequently used eight shell nouns (*result, effect, change, type, task, finding, method, measure*). They used these shell nouns more frequently with rhetorical functions of signaling moves and reiterating the encapsulated propositions across moves, as compared to L2 students.

Keywords: expert abstracts, L2 student abstracts, rhetorical moves, shell nouns