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Corpus Analysis of Discourse Moves in Apprentice and Professional Reports

Corpus linguistic techniques have been criticized for encouraging a more bottom-up rather than top-down processing of text (Swales 2004). This point may be valid for those analyses in which truncated concordance lines are examined without recourse to the overall discourse, such as is the case where 2000-word samples of texts are used for compiling the corpus. However, a more top-down approach can be achieved by integrating corpus-based and genre-based approaches to analysis of whole texts (Flowerdew, in press). In the last few years, some very fruitful genre-based corpus studies have been carried out based on Swales' move structure analysis. Such studies are mostly carried out on specialised corpora displaying fairly prototypical move structure patterning of a particular genre, e.g. job application letters (Upton & Connor 2001), and law cases (Bhatia et al 2004), which are amenable to tagging of the move structures (Flowerdew 2004).

Recommendation-based reports are another type of documentation, which lend themselves to this kind of genre-based corpus analysis. This paper reports on research carried out on a 250,000-word corpus of professional environmental reports and a comparable corpus of recommendation-based reports produced by apprentice writers, i.e. final-year undergraduate tertiary students. I will first describe the tagset devised for coding the move structures identified in the Introduction, Body and Conclusion of these reports, with particular reference to the role and difficulties posed by sub-headings for delineating the various move structures. I will then explain how certain keywords (e.g. *problems*, *recommendation*, *implementation*) have been found to have different lexico-grammatical patterning according to the move structure that they occupy. Salient differences between the generic move structure of keyword patterning in the apprentice and professional corpus will also be discussed. It is proposed that examining the lexico-grammatical patterning of keywords within the rhetorical moves that they occupy in the three main report sections makes for a more top-down approach to corpus-based work.

References

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