

## Rhetorical Structures in Research Introductions: A Case Study of the Journal of Second Language Writing

**Yasir Hussain**, *Department of English, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan*

**Sajid Ali Yousuf Zai**, *Inter Boards Coordination Commission (IBCC), Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Islamabad, Pakistan*

**Shahzad Ali Gill**, *The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan*

Keywords	Abstract
Genre Analysis, Schematic Structure, Research Articles, Meta-Discourse.	<i>This study provides an in-depth examination of the rhetorical organisation in the 45 research articles' introduction sections published in the Journal of Second Language Writing (JSLW). It explores whether authors from different institutional and geographical backgrounds, writing within the same discourse community, exhibit similar structural patterns in their introductions. To carry out this analysis, coding techniques and genre analysis were employed. The findings indicate that all authors adhered to the general structure presented in Swales' CARS model; however, differences appeared in the specific move sequences used. While some authors followed a straightforward progression, others employed more intricate and layered rhetorical patterns. The move structures identified in this study could serve as a valuable meta-discourse framework to assist novice scholars in creating coherent and effective introductions for academic publications. The study is fundamental in understanding the nuances in writing, especially for writers learning English as a second language.</i>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Effective language use within a specific context, or what Tardy (2009) describes as “typified discourse,” serves as one way to define a genre. Such discourses can act as recognized social and academic frameworks through which students and writers alike can showcase their knowledge, skills, and scholarly achievements throughout their education. Perhaps, both experienced and emerging scholars are encouraged to employ language in particular ways that align with the journal's goals and the dynamics of the writer-audience relationship. Previous experiences with the genre also shape writers' abilities to produce new texts. While genre often indicates our potential writing styles, it can also vary within a single discipline. As Samraj (2004) argues academic research papers from different fields may differ in various aspects yet belong to a similar genre (cited in Johns et al., 2006).

While it may seem artistic, the term “genre” has long been linked to various forms of art, texts, and visual representations in literature and music. Recently, however, the concept of genre and its pedagogy have expanded to encompass diverse perspectives, highlighting genre as a potent tool for teaching. This evolution encourages valuing the linguistic, cultural, rhetorical and social diversity that both ESL and L1 students take to the classroom. The debate over the definition of genre originates from Miller's (1984) article, *Genre as a Social Action*. She tackles genre from a

practical angle, blending a socio-cultural viewpoint. Miller argues for a more pragmatic understanding of genre instead of a purely semantic or syntactic one. She believes that, as noted in her article (1984), rhetorical criticism lacks clear direction on what defines a genre. Moreover, she examines various studies that have endeavored to define the rhetorical genre, stressing that it should account for both substance (semantics) and form (syntax), while also incorporating the pragmatics or actions of discourse. Essentially, genre serves as a discursive instrument aimed at achieving certain actions. Through her review of diverse studies and genre theories, Miller illuminates the intricacies and limitations of creating a discourse taxonomy, which often falls short of connecting social action with both meaning and form in rhetorical genres. Ultimately, genre is understood in a similar manner to how rhetoricians and audiences interpret and apply it.

A considerable number of scholars specialising in genres predominantly agree that genres possess a significant level of complexity. This complexity likely attracts numerous scholars in the field of writing, as “a genre represents a connection between the textual, social, and political aspects of writing.” Swales (1990) provides a comprehensive definition of the genre, as follows:

“A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. ... In addition, genre can exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realised, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community” (p. 58).

Martin (1993) defines genre analysis as the identification of consistent patterns in structured, goal-directed social activities. Swales (1990) emphasises this as a uniformity in communicative goals (Bhatia, 1993 & 2004). The main objective of genre analysis is to investigate discourse's communicative aims and the linguistic strategies employed. Dudley-Evans and John (1998) point out that a crucial element of analysis (genre) is the capacity to link text features to the attributes of the discourse community that produces a genre (pp. 91-92). Furthermore, Tardy and Swales (2014) claim that the fundamental objective of analysis (genre) is to understand the language function in a community (p. 167). In fact, genre analysis allows researchers, educators, students, and policymakers to transcend a simplistic view of language for specific purposes, nurturing a more sophisticated and intricate understanding of language within societal contexts (Tardy, 2011).

To extend the argument, research articles (RAs) rank among the most thoroughly examined genres. Hyland (2000) stated that RAs are widely accessible to researchers, educators, and practitioners, serving as tools for self-reflection and advocating for educational change. They are characterised as “a recognisable communicative purpose and the presence of characteristic features with standardised form, function, and presentation that are part of their general conventions” (Thomas & Hawes, 1994). Thus, performing a genre analysis of RAs can effectively describe and connect their linguistic characteristics. Moreover, the outcomes of such analyses can offer crucial insights for writers aiming to create effective research articles that comply with generic guidelines and discourse norms.

Numerous studies on research articles (RAs) have primarily focused on their introductory sections, analyzing the rhetorical strategies and organisational frameworks- macro structures- used by authors (e.g., Swales, 1990 & 2004; Keshavarz et al., 2007; Samraj, 2002). Further research has also examined how different sections of RAs are structured across various scientific disciplines (Holmes, 1997; Lindeberg, 1994; Brett, 1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). The Introduction section stands out as a key focus in the genre analysis of RAs, clearly demonstrating how authors justify their research, set topics, shift from general discussions to specific research questions or hypotheses, and guide readers on recent advancements in the field (e.g., Derntl, 2014). Despite ongoing academic contributions to diverse scholarly journals globally, researchers and members of speech communities often encounter a lack of “typified discourse” (Tardy, 2009) necessary for successful publication internationally. Moreover, novice researchers need to improve their grasp of the various rhetorical strategies utilised in scholarly writing.

Many researchers have explored ‘Introductions’ using the well-known Create a Research Space Model (CARS), which has been developed and refined by Swales over the years (1981, 1990, 2004). The CARS model offers a helpful framework for understanding the rhetorical and linguistic strategies that writers apply in their research article introductions. These strategies specifically involve (a) defining a territory, (b) pinpointing a niche, and (c) securing that niche. Additionally, the model elaborates on each strategy with thorough descriptions, aiding researchers in understanding the subtleties of academic discourse and formulating their own academic voice community. It also reminds researchers of the significance of context in every piece of writing and emphasises that each part of academic writing has a special communicative purpose, all contributing harmoniously to the central idea of the text.

While numerous studies have examined the introductions of research articles, relatively few have focused on genre analysis within the context of a single, specialised journal. By concentrating on a journal dedicated to second language writing, this study seeks to support authors who use English as a Second Language (ESL) by identifying essential rhetorical strategies that may enhance their opportunities for publication in the *Journal of Second Language Writing*.

### **1.1. Aim and Purpose**

This study seeks to analyze the rhetorical and organisational structures found in the introduction parts of research papers featured in the *Journal of Second Language Writing* (JSLW). Recognized as a reputable, peer-reviewed publication, JSLW focuses on scholarship related to L2 writing, applied linguistics, and language pedagogy. According to its stated aims, the journal is committed to disseminating theoretically grounded research and critical discussions that address key issues in the teaching and study of second and foreign language writing. The journal encourages authors to delve into various topics, including the unique traits and attitudes of L2 writers, their creative processes, the characteristics of their writing, how readers respond to L2 work, and the assessment practices surrounding it. Additionally, it welcomes explorations of the different contexts that influence L2 writing, such as cultural, social, political, and institutional factors, as well as any other themes related to L2 writing theory, research, or teaching.

## 1.2. Research Questions

1. What rhetorical structures are commonly employed in the introductions of articles published in the Journal of Second Language Writing (JSLW)?
2. To what extent do these articles consistently follow the identified rhetorical patterns?

Furthermore, we also developed sub-questions such as:

- a. What are the maximum and minimum numbers of moves mentioned in the articles?
- b. Are there any unique patterns used by some or most authors?

## 2. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

This research lends itself well to qualitative analysis while incorporating some quantitative elements throughout. The study examined 45 introductions from research articles published in a reputable journal focusing on Second Language Writing. We consciously chose to limit our scope to empirical studies, excluding theoretical articles and those from special issues. This decision stems from the understanding that an article's organisation-its rhetorical structure-can vary depending on its type (Crookes, 1986, as cited in Ozturk, 2007).

This study analyses 45 purposefully selected research articles through the lens of Swales's (1990) CARS model, which outlines three rhetorical moves. The selection of these articles is based on two main considerations: first, research articles constitute a prominent and widely recognized academic genre; and second, the study aims to investigate the diverse rhetorical and linguistic strategies adopted by various authors publishing in an international journal focused on second language (L2) writers. We focused on the volumes published between 2011 and 2015, excluding a special issue. We meticulously analyzed 15 articles individually over the course of a month. To ensure consistency and reliability, we also shared the findings with some colleagues and performed member checks for each article.

The CARS model proposed by Swales (1990) served as the analytical framework for examining the corpus of research article introductions (RAIs). As previously noted, the model outlines three primary rhetorical moves. The introduction generally begins with Move 1, where the author introduces the topic of the study. This is followed by Move 2, which establishes a research niche, and finally, Move 3, where the author describes how that niche is addressed. To facilitate systematic analysis, a coding scheme based on the model was devised, as detailed below.

**Table 1: Code scheme for the introduction section**

Move	Step/Way	Description	Code
Move 1: Establishing Territory	Step 1: Claiming Centrality	Asserting the topic's significance in the field.	M1S1
	Step 2: Contextualizing Topic	Providing broad context or trends in the research area.	M1S2
	Step 3: Synthesizing Literature	Reviewing and summarizing prior scholarly work.	M1S3
Move 2: Identifying a	Way 1: Counter-Existing	Challenging or opposing prior	M2W1

Niche	Claims	assumptions or findings.
	Way 2: Highlighting Gaps	Identifying unresolved questions or understudied areas. M2W2
	Way 3: Raising Critical Questions	Proposing unanswered inquiries to motivate the study. M2W3
	Way 4: Building on Traditions	Aligning with established methodologies or theories. M2W4
	Move 3: Occupying the Niche	
	Step 1A: Stating Objectives	Defining the goals and scope of the research. M3S1A
	Step 1B: Introducing the Study	Describing the current research's focus and novelty. M3S1B
	Step 2: Presenting Key Findings	Summarizing the study's most significant results. M3S2
	Step 3: Outlining Structure	Previewing the article's organization and flow. M3S3

## Research Article Structure Framework

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part of the study provides a comprehensive examination and interpretation of the rhetorical strategies employed in the introductory sections of research articles featured in the Journal of Second Language Writing (JSLW). A table is included to present the frequency and arrangement of these rhetorical moves across the fifteen articles selected for analysis.

**Table 2: Descriptive Chart of the Different Moves in the Articles**

Research Article (RA)	Patterns of Schematic Structure											Total Move
1. Morton et al. (2015)-NS	M1S2	M1S2	M1S3	M1S2	M1S3	M2W4	M1S3	M3S1A	M3S1B	M3S1A	M3S2	11
2. Worden (2015)-NS	M1S3	M2W2	M3S1A	M3S1B	M3S3							5
3. Han & Hyland (2015)-NNS	M1S1	M1S3	M1S2	M2W2	M3S1B/ M3S1A	M3S1B/ M3S2						8
3. Junqueira & Payant (2015)-NS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M2W2	M1S3	M2W4	M3S1B	M3S1A	M3S2	M3S3		10
5. Polio & Shea (2014)-NS	M1S2	M1S3	M1S2	M1S1	M2W2	M1S3	M3S1A	M3S2				8
6. Nicolás-Conesa et al. (2014)-NNS	M1S2	M1S3	M2W2	M1S3	M2W2	M3S1B	M3S1A	M1S3	M3S3			9
7. Heng & Kubota (2014)-NS	M1S1/ M1S3	M1S2	M2W2	M3S1B	M3S1A	M3S3	M3S2					7
8. Lee & Coniam, (2013)-NNS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M1S2	M2W2	M2W3	M3S1B	M3S1A	M3S2			9
9. Hyland (2013)-NS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M1S2	M2W2/ M3S1B	M3S1A	M3S2					8
10. Ferris et al. (2013) -NS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M2W2	M2W4	M3S1B	M3S2					7
11. Fernández Dobao (2012) -NNS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M2W2	M2W3	M3S1B	M3S1A	M3S2				8
12. Weigle & Parker (2012) – NS	M1S1	M1S3	M1S2	M1S3	M2W3	M1S3	M2W2	M3S1B	M3S1A	M3S2		10
13. Shi (2012)-NNS	M1S1	M1S3	M2W3/ M3S1A									4
14. Costino & Hyon (2011) – NS	M1S3	M1S1	M1S2	M2W3/ M3S1B	M3S1A	M3S3	M3S2					8

15. Yasuda (2011)-NNS	M3S1A	M3S1 B	M1S3	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M2W3					7
16. Pecorari (2015)-NNS	M1S2	M1S1	M1S3	M2W1	M2W2	M2W4						6
17. McDonough & Crawford (2014)-NNS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M2W1	M2W2	M2W3	M3S1A	M3S1B	M2W3	M3S2		10
18. Lee (2013)-NNS	M1S1	M1S2	M2W3	M1S3	M2W2	M3S1A	M3S1B	M3S3				8
19. Canagarajah (2013)-NNS	M1S1	M1S3	M2W1	M2W2	M3S1A	M3S1B	M3S3					7
20. Byrnes (2013)-NS	M1S1	M1S2	M1s3	M2W2	M2W1							5
21. Jwa (2012)-NNS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M1S2	M2W2	M2W1	M2W2	M3S1B	M3S3	M3S1A	M3S3	11
22. Gebhard,et.al. (2013)-NS	M1S3	M1S2	M1S1	M2W1	M2W2	M2W4	M3S1A	M3S3				8
23. Bunch & Willett (2013)- NS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M3S1A	M3S1B	M2W4	M3S3					7
24. Abasi (2012)-NNS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M3S1B	M3S1A	M3S3						6
25. Kormos (2012)-NS	M1S1	M1S3	M2W2	M2W3	M2W4	M2W3	M3S1A	M3S1B	M3S3			9
26. Harman (2013)-NS	M1S1	M1S3	M1S2	M1S3	M2W2	M3S1A	M3S1B	M2W3 (recursive)				8
27. Zhang (2013)-NNS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M2W1	M2W2	M2W4	M3S1A	M3S3	M3S1B	M3S3		10
28. Wigglesworth & Storch (2012)-NS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M3S1A	M3S3	M3S1B	M3S3					7
29. Liard��t (2013)-NS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M2W1	M3S1A	M3S1B						6
30. Johnson, et al, (2012)-NS	M1S1	M1S2	M1S3	M2W1	M2W2	M3S1A	M3S3					7
31. Kobayashi, & Rinnert, (2013)-NNS	M3S1B	M2W2	M3S1B	M3S1A	M3S2/ M3S3							6
32. Ryshina-Pankova & Byrnes (2013)-NNS	M3S1A/ M3S1B	M1S3	M2W4	M1S3/ M1S1	M2W2	M1S2	M3S3	M3S2				10
33. Neff-Van Aertselaer (2013)-NNS	M3S1A	M1S3	M2W4	M1S2	M3S1B	M3S2						6
34. Yang, Lu, & Weigle (2015)-NNS	M1S1	M2W2	M1S3	M3S1A	M3S1B	M3S3	M3S1B					7
35. Flowerdew (2015)-NS	M3S1B/ M1S1	M1S2	M2W1	M1S3/ M2W1	M3S1B	M3S1A	M2W1	M3S1A/ M3S2				10
36. Liu, & Brown (2015)- NNS/NS	M1S1	M2W2	M2W3	M2W2	M1S3	M2W1	M2W2	M3S1A	M3S1B	M3S2	M3S3	11
37. Pecorari, (2015)-NNS	M1S1	M2W2	M1S3	M3S1B	M2W1	M3S3						6
38. Hu (2015)-NNS	M3S1B	M1S3	M2W3	M1S2	M2W4	M2W2						6
39. Weber-Wulff (2015)- NNS	M1S1/ M1S3	M1S1	M2W1	M2W2	M1S3	M1S2	M3S2					7
40. Taylor (2015)-NS	M1S1	M1S2	M3S1A	M3S1B	M1S3	M2W2	M2W4	M3S1B	M1S3			9
41. Zhang, Yan, & Liu (2015)-NNS	M1S2	M1S3/ M2W2	M1S2	M1S3	M3S1A/ M3S1B							7
42. Frear, & Bitchener (2015)-NS	M1S1/ M3S1B	M1S2	M2W1	M1S3	M3S1A	M3S1B	M3S2	M3S3	M3S3/ M3S1B			11
43. Petric (2015)-NNS	M2W2	M1S1/ M3S1B	M2W1	M2W3	M3S1B	M2W3	M2W2	M3S1B	M2W2	M3S1A		11
44. Matsuda, Saenkhum & Accardi (2013)-NNS	M1S1	M2W4	M1S2	M2W1	M1S2	M2W3	M3S1B/ M3S3					8
45. Pomerantz, Kearne (2012)-NS	M1S1	M1S2	M2W1	M1S3	M2W1	M2W2	M2W1	M3S1A	M2W2/ M2S1A	M2W4/ M3S3	M3S2	13

After analyzing the findings, we now present the answers to the questions and sub-questions we posed earlier:

The introductory sections of SLWJ research articles incorporate all three rhetorical moves proposed in Swales' (1990) CARS model. Our analysis of the movement patterns in these articles identified five unique schematic structure progression patterns: linear, recursive, regressive, partially regressive, and complex linear.

**Table 3: Development Trends of SLWJ RA Introductions**

No.	Patterns of Progression	Research Article	Total
1	Linear	14, 13, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 3, 2 and 16,17,19,20 ,22,24,25,27,28,29, and 30 34, 36, 37,39,40,41, 44, 45 9 of these authors are non-natives and the rest are native speakers	28
2	Recursive	1, 4, 5, 6,12, 18,21, and 26 31, 35, 38 Three of these articles were written by non-native speakers	12
3	Regressive	32, 33, and 15(N,N,S author)	3
4	Partially Regressive	23 (N,S author)	1
5	Complex Linear	42 (N,S Author)	1

i. The linear pattern shows a sequential progression from Move 1 to Move 2 and then to Move 3. Our analysis identified that most RA introductions, specifically nine articles, follow this linear introduction style. The next most common pattern is the recursive one, which transitions from Move 1 to either Move 2 or Move 3, but then revisits earlier moves; this pattern appears in five articles. The regressive pattern, found in just one article, starts with Move 3 and moves backward to Move 1 and Move 2, showcasing a reverse progression. The partly regressive pattern begins with Move 1, jumps to Move 3, and then reverts to Move 2 without completely going back to Move 1. Here, the author starts the introduction by first addressing the current study (Move 3) before discussing Moves 1 and 2. Furthermore, the linear complex pattern merges features of both regressive and recursive patterns, starting with a claim of centrality and announcing the current research. Its complexity arises from concluding the moves in a circular fashion while mainly following the linear structure (refer to the Appendix for examples of each pattern).

ii. A careful analysis of the chart reveals that the majority of the articles adopt a linear pattern in their move progression. In this approach, authors typically begin by establishing a research territory—through general statements and assertions of centrality—and occasionally incorporate references to prior literature. However, this does not imply that every article strictly adheres to all elements of the linear progression. Some authors employed only selected sub-moves, while others omitted them altogether. The overarching observation suggests that the general structural framework outlined by Swales in the CARS model is reflected in the introductions of most articles. Additionally, data from a second set of articles reveal instances of recursive movement, wherein the sequence of moves is repeated. This is evident in three articles where authors, after initiating with Moves 1 and 2, reintroduce Move 1 later in the text. Such repetitions may be

deliberate, possibly to underscore a significant point the author wants the reader to note, or they may reflect unconscious stylistic tendencies unique to individual writers. In sum, while all analyzed articles incorporate the three primary moves of the CARS model, they do so with varying progression styles, with the linear structure emerging as the most prevalent.

**iii.** Regarding our first sub-question, which concerns the maximum and minimum number of moves or steps employed within a single article, Table 4 provides relevant insights. Research Article (RA) 1 by Morton et al. (2015) and RA 21 both contain the highest number of moves—11 in total—while RA 13 by Shi (2012) features the fewest, with just 4 moves.

**iv.** An interesting feature observed during the examination of RA introductions is the merging of two distinct moves or steps within a single sentence. This phenomenon is exemplified in several articles and illustrates the flexible and sometimes blended application of the CARS model moves by authors.

- a. “This paper reports on an exploratory multiple-case study conducted against this backdrop to investigate four learners’ cognitive, behavioural, and affective engagement with teacher WCF in a Chinese tertiary-level EFL classroom” (Han & Hyland, 2015).
- b. We present four detailed case studies to reveal the complexities of learner engagement with WCF, providing new insights into L2 learners’ interactions with this feedback (Han & Hyland, 2015).
- c. The literature has often overlooked this feedback aspect. To fill this gap, we analyze the importance of writing and feedback from 20 participants across four faculties at a university in Hong Kong that uses English as the medium of instruction.

To understand the relationship between the CARS model and the authors’ RA structures, it’s essential to consider the linguistic identity of the writer. We aimed to investigate any similarities or differences between non-native speakers (NNS) and native speakers (NS) represented in the journal. A native speaker is defined as an individual who perceives ‘native speaker’ teachers as embodying a ‘Western culture,’ which serves as the source of the English language and its teaching methods (Holliday, 2006). Conversely, NNS comprises researchers, educators, and practitioners who do not speak English as their first language, resulting in a linguistic style and rhetoric influenced by their unique cultural contexts, often aligned with non-Western traditions. To categorise the authors as NS or NNS, we implemented straightforward method: by clicking on the author’s name in the journal, we accessed their biography. We cross-referenced it by searching for the author’s personal homepage to review their full biographies. This method allowed us to accurately classify the authors as either NS or NNS.

Our analysis of the findings (refer to tables 1 and 2) indicates that, overall, there was no discernible difference in the rhetorical patterns of introductions written by NS and NNS authors. Both groups predominantly utilised linear and recursive patterns in their introductions. However, among the remaining three patterned approaches, the regressive pattern was exclusively adopted by NNS authors, while the partly regressive and linear complex patterns were used solely by NS authors.



## 4. CONCLUSION

This research draws attention to an underexplored area that invites future inquiry—namely, the potential differences in academic writing practices between Native English Speakers (NES) and Non-Native English Speakers (NNES) within the context of scholarly publishing.

The genre analysis of the *Journal of Second Language Writing* was particularly important to our study. As a Non-Native Speaker of English (NNSE), we found the experience interesting and enlightening for understanding the nuances in writing, especially for writers learning English as a Second Language. Despite the varied moves in the introduction section of the journal, we conclude that Swales' CARS model (1990) has been frequently adopted as a framework for writing patterns by most authors. The moves, in terms of their order of use, have been experimented with; nevertheless, they are present in nearly all forms of academic writing.

Jim Cummins's (1980) concept of BICS and CALP, representing Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills and Cognitive Academic Learning Proficiency, respectively, supports the idea of academic language as demanding higher cognitive skills. He proposes that the communicative language learnt in context-embedded situations is different from the context-reduced academic language that is required for academic achievements. For BICS, Cummins roughly assigned two years to acquire; however, he said it takes almost 5 years to achieve CALP skills (1980). Similarly, Vygotsky, on the other hand, describes the language development and the psychological processes involved in his Sociocultural theory (1978). In one such explanation, Vygotsky says that "even the minimal level of development of written speech requires a high degree of abstraction" (p. 202).

### 4.1. Implication and Recommendation

The implications of this study can enable academic writers in English, especially those who are English as a second language writers or peripheral users, to become more cognisant writers. Thinking about the process of writing meta-cognitively could greatly help the English as a second language writer in two ways: firstly, to understand the requirements of the writing process itself as different than those of speaking English as a second language. Secondly, to successfully navigate through the principles of academic writing as a distinct genre of writing. Further research recommendations in the field should be conducted on how these writers can be perceived by the reviewers of the journal: how do writers construct their academic voice in the journal? And what language-specific features do these authors, especially the NNS, employ when they write to a Western audience? To what extent can the journal editors/reviewers encompass plural voices from across the globe?

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