

A Corpus-based Contrastive Analysis of Moves and Steps in Conclusion Sections

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Abstract: A research paper's conclusion acts as a standalone functional segment following fixed genre frameworks, whose communicative goals rely on organized rhetorical moves and sub-steps. Most existing genre analysis compares writing structures across distinct subjects or languages, yet few examine structural disparities between subfields within one single discipline. Translation Studies splits into Translation Theory and Interpreting Studies, two branches with vastly different research logics, though their conclusion structures have never undergone systematic comparison — this forms the core research question of the present work. Combining corpus contrast and genre analysis, this study uses Yang & Allison's move-step framework alongside Kanoksilapatham's frequency standards. It analyzes 100 SSCI journal conclusions split evenly between the two subfields, covering six research themes via LanksBox, Excel, DeepSeek, and manual coding. Results show theoretical papers adopt an argumentative mode with frequent evaluation and deduction, while interpreting papers stick to descriptive summaries with rare extended discussion. Such gaps mirror their divergent research cultures, filling intra-disciplinary genre research gaps and informing translation and academic writing teaching.

Keywords: Conclusion section; Translation theory; Interpreting studies; Genre analysis

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1. Introduction

Academic writing follows established norms and helps researchers effectively communicate and accumulate knowledge in their respective fields. Among them, the conclusion part is particularly critical: it synthesizes key findings, directly responds to research problems, and highlights the contribution of research. To achieve these functions, a clear step structure is essential.

Genre analysis is the main perspective to understand these structural patterns. Swales put forward the theory of "genre structural potential", which holds that although genre is flexible, its construction is based on repeated rhetorical steps. Most of the existing studies focus on the comparison between different disciplines or languages; for example, applied disciplines tend to emphasize summative steps, while theoretical disciplines prefer evaluative and deductive steps. Cultural and linguistic backgrounds also influence the author's choice of steps. However, in translation studies, most genre studies focus on the abstract and introduction, while the discussion in the conclusion is relatively less. From the perspective of methodology, Kanoksilapatham distinguished mandatory, optional, and conventional moves by setting frequency-based

standards, which promoted the development of this field.

However, there is still a significant gap: most studies focus on the wide differences between disciplines, but few studies focus on the structural variation between different subfields within a single discipline. Different subfields will form their own unique academic discourse conventions, which are shaped by different research objects, paradigms, and epistemologies, but this dimension is largely ignored.

This gap is particularly obvious in the field of translation studies, which is generally regarded as a homogeneous whole in the current academic circles. But in fact, there are fundamental differences between translation theory and interpretation research in terms of research objects, research methods, and the epistemological assumptions behind them. These differences are likely to lead to differences in the structure of the conclusion, but so far there has been no systematic study on this.

In order to make up for this deficiency, this study compared the conclusion structure and influencing factors of the two subfields. The study focuses on two issues: (1) how are the moves and steps of the conclusion part of translation studies distributed? (2) What are the specific differences between translation theories and the conclusions of interpretation studies?

In terms of methodology, this study combines corpus-based comparative analysis and genre analysis, and draws lessons from Yang and Allison's "move-step" model and Kanoksilapatham's frequency standard. The study constructed a parallel corpus containing 100 SSCI journal conclusions (50 in each subfield), which were analyzed by manual coding and combined quantitative and qualitative analysis with the help of DeepSeek, Excel, and Lancesbox. The research results aim to promote the development of genre theory through the introduction of an interdisciplinary hierarchical comparison perspective and provide differentiated teaching guidance for writing teaching in English for specific purposes (EAP) and translation studies.

2. Literature review

2.1. Genre analysis theory

The theory of genre structural potential (GSP) proposed by Swales (1990) marks a turning point in genre analysis, which regards genre as an orderly sequence of rhetorical steps, integrating Convention and flexibility^[1]. This change makes discourse analysis go beyond isolated language forms and turn to the social communication level, laying a foundation for academic genre research. For the conclusion part, Yang and Allison identified three main steps — summary, evaluation, and inference. Each step contains specific links and serves different communicative purposes. Kanoksilapatham then introduced the frequency-based standard, dividing the steps into three categories: mandatory, optional, and conventional, thus improving the objectivity and repeatability of step analysis.

2.2. Interdisciplinary and cross-language comparative study of the conclusion part of the research paper

In the past two decades, significant progress has been made in the study of the concluding move analysis. Bunton found that the move structure of doctoral dissertations is more complex than that of journal articles, reflecting different communicative purposes among different genres. Zamani and Ebadi compared the conclusions of Persian and English journal papers, and found that there was only a slight difference in frequency, but no significant difference in structure, which supported the applicability of the Yang and Allison model at the cross-language level^[2]. Recently, Kanoksilapatham analyzed the conclusions of 25 open access papers in four disciplines and proposed a three-step model, in which "restatement of key findings" is the most critical step. He also pointed out that the conclusion part is increasingly becoming an independent and stable part of the research paper, with its unique rhetorical structure. Deng and He, based on Hyland's framework, examine the position markers in 180 English and 180 Chinese papers and find that native English speakers and soft science authors tend to use more hedges and self-references. These observations are relevant to this research because position selection may interact with the distribution of steps among different subjects.

2.3. Current situation of genre analysis of academic discourse in translation studies

Genre analysis in translation studies started relatively late. So far, most studies have focused on the abstract and introduction. These parts have been studied in detail; the abstract follows the standard writing mode, and the introduction is usually used to set the background, point out the research gaps, and emphasize the value. However, two aspects are still neglected: the conclusion part lacks systematic attention, and the field is often regarded as a whole, ignoring the different research paradigms and writing norms between translation theory and interpretation research. This study fills this gap by comparing the conclusion structure of the two subfields, thus providing a more detailed understanding of the subject discourse.

3. Research design and methodology

In order to explore the conclusion structure of each subfield of translation studies, the study has constructed a special corpus and applied a set of validated analytical frameworks. The whole research process is rigorous and practical.

3.1. Construction of corpus

The study has constructed a professional, comparable, and balanced corpus, including two sub-corpora: one for translation theory and the other for interpretive research. All texts are from the field of translation studies to ensure disciplinary relevance. In order to achieve meaningful comparison, the study uses the same screening criteria in the two sub-corpora, and each sub-corpus contains 50 articles, which helps to avoid sample size deviation and maintain the balance of analysis.

The data are from six translation research journals included in SSCI, covering a series of core topics. The journals the study chose need to meet three conditions: SSCI coverage, wide subject coverage, and consistent editorial standards. Published from 2014 to 2025. The study only focuses on empirical research articles, excluding commentary and editorial articles, because the conclusions of such articles often lack a unified model. Finally, the corpus contains 100 conclusions, which are evenly distributed in two subdomains. For the articles with clearly marked conclusions, the study extracts the full text; For the parts not marked, it is logically selected as the final discussion paragraph of the conclusion. The study removed charts, references, and formatting errors, and saved each text as a separate TXT file. The word count results are quite close: the translation theory sub-corpus is about 52000 words (about 1040 words per conclusion on average), and the interpretation research sub-corpus is about 51500 words (about 1030 words per article on average).

3.2. Analysis framework and tools

In terms of structural analysis, the study adopts the step-by-step model proposed by Yang and Allison (2003), which divides the conclusion into three hierarchical steps: summary (M1), evaluation (M2), and derivation (M3)^[3]. In order to quantify the importance of each step, the study applied the frequency standard of Kanoksilapatham (2005) and divided the steps into required steps (appearing in 100% of the text), optional steps (60%–99%), and conventional steps (less than 60%).

The analysis tool combines manual coding with software support. First, the study manually marked the boundaries of steps and steps, and then used Excel to calculate the frequency and word frequency ratio. Lancesbox is used for corpus processing, while DeepSeek helps standardize coding logic, thus reducing human errors.

3.3. Analysis process and quality control

The study followed a four-stage process: data collection, method determination, analysis and implementation, and result synthesis. After screening and coding eligible literature, the study adopted the Yang and Allison framework and a unified annotation scheme. The frequency and distribution were obtained through quantitative analysis using Excel and Lancesbox; At the same time, the qualitative analysis of typical samples helped the author understand the functional logic behind the choice of different structures. Then, the study integrated the two types of data evidence to answer the research questions.

To ensure the reliability of the study, the study took additional measures: two coders discussed the framework and

coded 10 samples on a pilot basis to optimize the coding guide; Then, 20 texts (accounting for 20% of the total corpus) were randomly selected from the corpus and encoded by two coders independently. The study used Cohen's kappa coefficient to measure the consistency between different coders, and set a threshold of 0.75 to indicate high reliability, and 0.60–0.75 to indicate acceptable reliability. Any differences were resolved by revising the coding guidelines and recoding, and further reducing bias combined with DeepSeek cross-check. In terms of quantification, the study calculated the frequency of moves and steps, the occurrence rate (that is, the percentage of each move in the text), and the average word length. At the same time, the study also made comparison tables and charts to visualize the differences between the two sub-areas. In the qualitative aspect, the study selected representative samples with obvious structural differences, analyzed their language expression and functional motivation, and linked these differences with the different orientations of translation theory and interpretation research in epistemology and paradigm. This comprehensive method enables the author to reveal the deep relationship between the conclusion structure and the discipline writing norms, so as to comprehensively grasp the existing laws.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

This section first presents the overall distribution of the expressions in the whole corpus, and then focuses on the significant differences between translation theory and interpretation research.

4.1.1. Overall distribution patterns

Among the 100 conclusions sampled, summative expression (M1) was dominant and appeared in 83% of the papers. This high proportion shows that the restatement of key findings has almost become a common practice in translation studies, regardless of the subject area (**Table 1**). In contrast, evaluative expression (M2) only appears in 41% of texts, while deductive expression (M3) is less common, accounting for only 19%. At first glance, the whole field seems to prefer direct generalization to critical analysis or forward-looking inference. However, these overall data are misleading — they cover up the big differences between the two sub-areas, which will be described in detail below.

Table 1. Frequency comparison

Move	Frequency	%	Functions
M1	290	83	Reviewing the research objectives, core methodology, and main findings.
M2	134	41	Evaluating research value, limitations, and methodological applicability
M3	49	19	Proposing future research directions or distilling research insights

4.1.2. Comparative analysis by subfield

When the study subdivides the corpus, the situation becomes more noticeable (**Table 2**). The summary rate of the translation theory sub-corpus (TTSC) and the interpretive research sub-corpus (ISC) is almost the same (83% vs. 82%), indicating that both groups tend to report their research results. However, the similarity is nothing more than that. In the “evaluation” step, TTSC used this method in up to 62% of its conclusions, while ISC was only 20%. In the “derivation” step, the gap is more obvious: TTSC is 36%, while ISC is only 2%. These differences reflect two distinct rhetorical strategies. The research conclusion of translation theory often constructs a complete and demonstrative narrative by combining abstract, evaluation, and derivation, critically reflects on its own findings, and looks forward to the future direction. In contrast, most of the research conclusions of explanatory research are mainly abstracts, which provide concise and clear answers, and rarely criticize or speculate.

Table 2. Move comparison of TTSC and ISC

<i>Move</i>	<i>TTSC</i>	<i>ISC</i>	<i>Difference Value</i>
<i>M1</i>	84	82	2
<i>M2</i>	62	20	42
<i>M3</i>	36	2	34

At the step level, the differences become more detailed. In the “evaluation” step, the study examined three sub-steps: elaborating research significance (m2s1), acknowledging limitations (m2s2), and evaluation methodology (m2s3) (**Table 3**). In translation studies, assessment tends to focus too much on practical significance — m2s11 accounts for 88% of all assessment cases. However, translation theory presents a more balanced feature: 46% of meaning, 40% of limitations, and 14% of methodological assessment. This shows that the authors of translation theory are more inclined to reflect on the boundaries and methods of their own research, thus adding depth and preciseness to the conclusion.

Table 3. Step comparison of M2

<i>Step</i>	<i>TTSC (%)</i>	<i>ISC (%)</i>
M2S1	46	88
M2S2	40	54
M2S3	14	38

For deductive reasoning, although generally rare, its sub-steps clearly reflect the tendencies of different sub-domains (**Table 4**). Translation theory (TTSC) often contains suggestions for future research and theoretical or teaching implications, forming a theory-oriented deductive model to actively promote knowledge expansion. In international semantics (ISC), deductive reasoning almost does not exist (only 2%); even if it does, its rhetorical influence is minimal. In essence, translation theory promotes the development of academic dialogue through deduction, while translation studies always focus on the statements and reports of the existing findings. Taken together, these results show that although the two subdomains share a common summary function, there are significant differences in the practice of evaluation and reasoning, which reflect the bigger differences in epistemology and the discipline norms that shape the writing styles of academic groups.

Table 4. Step comparison of M3

<i>Step</i>	<i>TTSC</i>	<i>ISC</i>
M3S1	42	44
M3S2	36	50

4.2. Discussion

The analysis reveals that there are two different rhetorical patterns in the conclusion of translation studies. Translation theory papers adopt the argumentation style, frequently using evaluation (62%) and deduction (36%) to provide balanced criticism and theoretical speculation. In contrast, the conclusions of interpretation studies are mainly summarized (82%), only occasionally focusing on the evaluation of practical relevance, and almost no deduction is used (2%). These differences are rooted in the epistemological orientation of the discipline: translation theory tends to be humanistic and interpretative, while interpretation research follows the logic of empirical problem solving.

Therefore, for the first research question, in general, summary expression accounted for 83% of all conclusions, evaluation accounted for 41%, and deduction only accounted for 19%. From the perspective of specific steps, interpretation

studies emphasize practical significance, while translation theory maintains a balance between importance, limitations, and methodological evaluation, and uses deduction to explore the direction and impact of future research. As for the second question, the study finds obvious intra-disciplinary differences: the construction of translation theory has demonstrative and forward-looking conclusions, while interpretation studies remain concise and focus on reporting statements. These opposing patterns form a unique discourse identity shaped by sub-domain norms.

5. Conclusion

By shifting genre analysis from interdisciplinary comparison to interdisciplinary comparison, this study reveals how sub-domain epistemology affects structure selection and has made some academic contributions. At the same time, the study also provides practical guidance for the writing teaching of English for specific purposes (EAP) and translation studies, breaking through the “one size fits all” teaching mode. However, there are limitations in this study: the study only relies on SSCI sources, manual coding may be biased, and it only examines the macro structure. Future research can expand the source of the corpus, include more subfields, analyze the characteristics of language markers, or use a diachronic perspective to track the evolution of these patterns over time.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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