

STYLISTIC PECULIARITIES OF ACADEMIC WRITING ON ARCHITECTURE: ABSTRACTS

Academic writing skills is an important thing for every researcher to develop a successful academic career. The abstract is one of the most important structural elements of a scientific article. It is required for all the articles published not only by leading world publishers, but also by the most Russian ones. However, in practice, young researchers, including the field of architecture, are not sufficiently familiar with abstract text structure and their stylistic peculiarities in English. The aim of the study is to analyze the structural, linguistic and stylistic features of abstracts in architectural articles as well as develop the instructions for abstract writing based on the analyses. The study included analyzing the text structure, the volume of a text as a whole and its compositional element, cohesion (means of logical connection). To conduct the linguistic analysis, a descriptive method was used, which included observing the language means used to express the above text categories. Results show that the average abstract volume is 1100 – 1200 printed characters with spaces (approximately 200 – 210 words). Abstracts are a single paragraph texts and their volume can vary significantly the main structural elements are the “Background”, “Objectives”, “Methods”, “Research Results” and “Conclusions”, which is the “core” of the semantic and compositional structure in abstracts. The volume of each structural element is also largely individual (1 – 3 sentences). Each structural element has lexical and grammatical markers, that can be considered as clichés and standardized language means for abstract style. Linking words are not often used in abstracts on architecture. It is due to the fact that the text cohesion in abstracts is implicit as the texts have a very rigid compositional structure. The study concludes that structural, volume and cohesion analyses help reveal the basic abstracts contents and stylistic features. The results of the analyses can be used to formulate the guidelines on abstract writing for young researchers in the field of architecture.

Keywords: academic writing, style of abstracts, text structure, text volume, guidelines for abstract writing.

Nowadays, the necessity to present the results of scientific research in various scientific journals is one of the important requirements for modern researchers. A high scientific citation index is a key to developing a successful academic career. Of great importance here are good skills of the English language for scientific purposes including academic writing skills. Thus, developing guidelines for abstract writing based on genre studies are becoming particularly relevant today.

The abstract is one of the most important structural elements of a scientific article. It is required for all the articles published not only by leading world publishers, but also by the most Russian ones. However, in practice, young researchers, including the field of architecture, are not sufficiently familiar with abstract text structure and their stylistic features in English. One of the reasons for this may be the lack of linguistic text analysis in the architectural field,

as well as the guidelines to develop abstract writing skills. Thus, the purpose of the paper is to analyze the structural, linguistic and stylistic features of abstracts in architectural articles as well as develop the instructions for abstract writing based on the analyses.

The aims if the abstract analyses include:

- to reveal the text structure;
- to analyze the volume of a text as a whole and its compositional elements;
- to analyze cohesion (means of logical connection).

To conduct the linguistic analysis, a descriptive method was used, which included observing the language means used to express the above text categories.

For the analysis, we chose fifty scientific abstracts in English from a number of journals on architecture which are included into the Scopus scientific citation base: “Frontiers of Architectural Research”, “International Journal

of Sustainable Built Environment”, “Journal of Urban Management” and others.

Scientifically, the abstract is a genre of the scientific prose style. It gives a brief overview of a scientific writing. According to the purpose of communication, abstracts are classified into the following types:

- descriptive;
- informative;
- reviewing;
- recommending;
- and critical ones.

According to the scope of the contents, abstracts are classified into general and specializing types. The former gives a general overview of a writing, the latter focuses on a certain aspect. Abstracts can be short, consisting of several words or small phrases or expanded ones with 600 – 1000 printed characters (9, p. 6).

Abstracts in scientific articles belong to the reviewing type. Their purpose is to attract specialists’ attention to the writing and to present the range of the issues discussed. They help the readers to assess the necessity to read the original text. Abstracts indicate which data can be found in them, without giving a detailed step by step describing the contents (4, p. 6). Their volume is approximately 700 – 800 printed characters with spaces and symbols (10).

Abstracts have a rigid text structure. For example, the European Association of Science Editors recommend the following structural elements:

- background (the importance of the study);
- objectives (research objectives);
- methods (research methods);
- results (research results);
- conclusions;
- final conclusions (the research theoretical and practical significance).

Abstracts style is laconic, clear and convincing. They do not contain background information. Lexical and grammatical units are characterized by a high level of clichés and standardized language means and norms. A cliché is a speech stereotype, a standard used to easily reproduce in certain situations and contexts. Academic writing has a number of similar speech stereotypes. They facilitate the communication process, save time and mental efforts (5).

Cliches in abstracts are typical for using lexical phrases, grammatical constructions (e.g. passive voice, participial and gerundial phrases, the predominant present tense of the verb, etc).

In abstracts, only standardized terminology is used. In social writings, the use of the terminology of the source document is allowed. There are other standards and norms for using

lexical units. In abstracts only the commonly used abbreviations can be given. In exceptional cases their definitions can be presented. Units of measurement are given in international SI systems.

Results

I. Text volumes

The volume of analyzed abstracts ranges from approximately 500 printed characters with spaces (65 words) to 1600 printed characters with spaces (264 words). However, the average abstract volume is 1100 – 1200 printed characters with spaces (approximately 200 – 210 words). As a rule, an abstract is a single paragraph text. The volumetric varieties of abstracts are usually required by the editors and can vary in editorial departments.

The volume of each structural element is also largely individual. Nevertheless, based on the analysis performed, the following average volumes can be presented:

- background (2 – 3 sentences);
- objectives (1 – 2 sentences);
- methods (1 – 2 sentences);
- results (2 – 3 sentences);
- conclusions (1 sentences);
- final conclusions (1 – 2 sentences).

The average volume of a simple sentence in abstracts is approximately 20 words. The minimal length of a simple sentence is 9 – 10 words and the maximum length is 33 words. The latter have sequences of homogeneous elements, complex groups of adverbial modifiers of place and purpose. The average volume of a compound sentence is approximately 33 – 37 words.

II. Text structure

The most frequent, and, therefore, the main, structural elements are the “Background”, “Objectives”, “Methods”, “Research Results” and “Conclusions”. The structural element “Study Focus”, which is not represented in the recommended structure of the European Association of Scientific Editors, is very often given within the objectives description. The elements “Background”, “Conclusions” and “Final conclusions” are not included into all the abstracts.

The study showed that the sequence of compositional blocks doesn’t vary greatly.

The statistical figures are as follows:

- background (80 %);
- objectives, study focus (100 %);
- methods (90 %);
- results (100 %);
- conclusions (80 %);
- final conclusions (45%).

Based on the figures, we can conclude that the background, focus and objective, methods,

results and conclusions form the “core” of the semantic and compositional structure in abstracts.

These structural elements have lexical and grammatical markers.

Background. It often marked with words and phrases of evaluative semantics:

extremely high, important; crucial, absolutely necessary, scarce, tremendous and so on. They are usually used to evaluate amounts, rates, levels, degrees, etc.

Examples.

1. ... predicting future trends of temporal and spatial changes are **absolutely necessary**.

2. **Studies** on indoor air quality of non-residential buildings are **scarce** in India.

Here, also the words “problem” “important” and “importance” are used.

Example.

1. Diyarbakir currently has two clay brick workshops that face the problem of being closed down.

Grammatically, lexical means are used with the Present Simple or Perfect verb forms.

Examples.

1. It **has become important** for land use planners to extract, detect, monitor and predict land use/cover changes.

2. Planning **is** a **crucial** element for any development initiative.

Objectives. In most cases, these structural elements are represented by one sentence. It is usually introduced by phrases: the paper (study), investigates (conducts an investigation, examined (-es), explores, reports, proposed (-es), discusses). This structural element can be also introduced by word “aim”. Using the pronoun “We” is also possible. The Past or Present Simple verb forms are used here.

Examples.

1. **The study examines** the factors responsible for the spatial variation in housing quality ...

2. **The aim of the study** is to explore the present practice and challenges of rooftop farming that was encountered by practitioners.

3. In this study, **we investigated** the character-defining features of Kingsway Street and Liverpool Street ...

Methods. One of the markers of this structural element is the word “method” or “methodology”. But in most of the cases just the names of scientific methods are used in combination with the phrase “based on”. The following verbs can be used as predicates: use, adopt, model.

Examples.

1. **The C-A Markov model was used** to predict future trend of LULC for the next 27-years.

2. The manufacturing phases of the clay bricks

in Diyarbakir were examined for the first time **based on in-situ observations, investigations and interviews**.

3. We **adopted a combination of mapping, philology, and fractal geometry** to assess the character-defining features of each street.

Results. The structural element is mostly marked with a combination of the word “results” or “findings” with the verbs: show, indicate, reveal. In some abstracts only verbs are used that can indicate the result of scientific research (e.g. find, demonstrate, propose, establish, present, observe) in the passive voice. We should note that in some cases this structural element does not have any special lexical markers. It is determined logically by the general meaning of the sentences.

Examples.

1. **Results show** that rooftop farming can support environment by improving air quality ...

2. **Findings revealed** that decentralization in national management and political structure has limited tasks and authority of urban management.

3. **Aspect ratio was found** to have a considerable influence on the air temperature distribution in both areas.

Conclusions. In practice, the contents of results and conclusions are very closely related with each other, hence, in many abstracts we didn't observe a clear distinction between these two structural elements. Conclusions usually give a final, a highly generalized result. To mark this element, only in some cases the words “to conclude”, “therefore” or “furthermore” are used. In many cases this structural unit has no any special markers and can be determined logically, based on the contents.

Examples.

1. **The study concludes** that design values and perceptions of architecture ...

2. **Furthermore**, the rhetorical language which architects use is not read as such by the public.

3. **Therefore**, their production must be continuous.

4. **One of the significant findings from the non-practitioner survey** is that maximum people are willing to practice rooftop farming ...

Final conclusions. Usually this structural element is the final sentence in an abstract. Statistically, it is presented only in 50 % of all the analyzed abstracts. It contains recommendations, the fields where the results can be used. It can be marked with words “useful”, “feasible” and “recommend”.

Examples.

1. The results of this **study provide useful**

information for planning, building and modifying urban structures.

2. The model suggested by this **paper will be feasible** in similar regions everywhere ...

3. **It is recommended** that non-conforming buildings, particularly, residential, and insanitary environment should be put in check through very sanitary laws.

III. Cohesion

One of the most typical features of academic writings is a wide usage of linking words which provide evidence, logic and consistency. But, our study showed that linking words are not often used in abstracts on architecture. It is due to the fact that the text cohesion in abstracts is implicit as the texts have a uniform compositional structure (8).

We observed the following classes of linking words:

- demonstrative pronouns and words (this, present, current);
- opposing words (however, meanwhile);
- generalizing words (finally);
- words of cause and reason (therefore);
- supplementing words (furthermore).

Generalizing and supplementing words, words of cause and reason are mainly used in conclusions.

Conclusions

Based on the study, we can conclude that structural, volume and cohesion analyses help reveal the basic abstracts contents and stylistic features. The results of the analyses can be used to formulate the recommendations on abstract writing for young researchers in the field of architecture.

1. The average volume of an abstract is 800 printed characters. The exact number is set by the editor.

2. The abstract is typically a one-paragraph text.

3. The typical abstract structure includes the sequence of the elements: background (2 – 3 sentences); objectives (1 – 2 sentences); methods (1 – 2 sentences); results (2-3 sentences); conclusions (1 sentence); final conclusions (1 – 2 sentences).

The typical words and phrases used to start the structural elements:

- background (“extremely high /important /crucial /absolutely necessary /scarce / tremendous”);

- objectives (the paper (study), investigates (“conducts an investigation / examined (-es) / explores /reports /proposed (-es) /discusses; we investigated /the paper aims”);

- methods (“the method was used to ...; we adopted ...”);

- results (“results /findings show /indicate / reveal; ... find /demonstrate /propose /establish / present /observe” in the passive voice);

- conclusions (“the study concludes ... / therefore /furthermore”);

- final conclusions (“study provide useful information for / this paper will be feasible in / it is recommended that”).

Recommendations for using linking words:

- use the phrases: “this /present /current study” when speaking about the study;

- use the words “however /meanwhile” to give the opposite ideas or conclusions;

- when giving the results, use the generalizing words “finally”;

- when giving the conclusions, use words “therefore / furthermore”.

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