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**Master's Theses Written by Vietnamese and International Writers:
Rhetorical Structure Variations**

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Abstract

A master's thesis is a high stakes genre at the summit of a student's academic accomplishment, and writing a thesis in English is reported to pose difficulties for non-native English speaking students. Given the difficulty of writing master's theses and their importance in students' academic achievement, scarce or even non-existent research has been conducted on this specific genre written by Vietnamese students. This paper, therefore, presents the study on the rhetorical structure of 24 master's theses in TESOL produced at three universities in Vietnam. Employing Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework, the results revealed the similarities and differences in the moves and steps of each chapter in the theses written by Vietnamese and those by international writers from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database (ProQuest). Moreover, these findings indicated both these Vietnamese writers' conformity to the rhetorical norms and their adaptation to suit their discourse community's expectations.

Keywords: *Rhetorical structures; Master's thesis; Vietnamese writers; TESOL; Genre Analysis*

1. Introduction

Writing a thesis in English poses difficulties for non-native English speaking students (Dong, 1998; Paltridge, 2002b; Shaw, 1991). In Vietnam, as revealed in informal conversations with thesis writers, TESOL masters' (M.A.) students have no or little formal instruction on how to write each part of a thesis, but only guidelines. Despite their wording differences, the guidelines on thesis writing provided by each university generally suggest some skeletal structures around which their students assemble their theses. These students, therefore, have to rely on their university's guidelines, published books on thesis writing, or theses written by students in previous courses in their school library in order to format their own theses. However, Paltridge (2002b) states that guidelines and handbooks which focus on thesis writing do not show students the range of thesis options and provide the rationale for the various choices thesis writers make.

Given the difficulty of writing M.A. theses and their importance in students' academic achievement, the master thesis has not received as much attention as the Ph.D. dissertation (Chen & Kuo, 2012; Samraj, 2008). Indeed, few studies have focused on the overall structure of a M.A. thesis although a large number of studies on research articles (RAs) and some on Ph.D.

dissertations were conducted (Bunton, 2002, 2005; Dong, 1998; Kwan, 2006; Soler-Monreal, Carbonell-Olivares, & Gil-Salom, 2011; Thompson, 1999, 2001, 2005). Some studies of M.A. theses have explored the organization of certain sections of this genre, such as *Introduction* and *Discussion* sections (Dudley-Evans, 1986), *Conclusions* (Hewings, 1993) and *Acknowledgements* (Zhang, 2012) and the overall organization of the thesis with a focus on the structure of *Introductions* across disciplines (Paltridge, 2002b; Samraj, 2008). The only study of all the chapters of 20 M.A. theses in the field of Applied Linguistics taken from ProQuest was carried out by Chen and Kuo (2012). Their study shows the overall structures as well as some special characteristics of M.A. theses in Applied Linguistics. Although these studies have provided us with a preliminary understanding of the generic structure of M.A. theses, they have focused on the texts produced in some British, American, and Australian institutions and by international writers. What is apparent is the scarcity of studies on texts written by non-English writers and especially on the rhetorical structure of the whole M.A. theses written by Vietnamese students. With respect to these identified problems, this study aims to answer the question “To what extent are the move-step structures in theses written by Vietnamese graduate students different from or similar to those of international writers from ProQuest?”

2. Methods

The data consist of 24 electronic TESOL M.A. theses written during the years 2009-2012 by Vietnamese students. Only the theses produced during this period of time in the South of Vietnam were selected since generic structures are subject to variation across time and this selection of theses is expected to reflect the current practice of thesis writing by this group of M.A. students in this part of Vietnam. These theses were randomly obtained with the writers' consent from the libraries of all three universities providing the TESOL M.A. program (eight from each). After permissions were obtained from the heads of the English departments, the researchers contacted thesis writers for their permission to use the theses. After receiving the thesis writers' permission, the researchers informed the librarians or the program coordinators and the electronic theses were sent to the researchers.

To create a corpus, each thesis was randomly coded from T1-T24 for the ease of reference and the anonymity of the thesis writers. Each chapter of these theses was then copied and pasted onto a separate file and they were also randomly coded from 1 to 24 (for example, A1-A24 for

Abstracts and I1-I24 for Introductions). The resulting corpus of 24 theses consisted of 490,666 words (an average of 77 pages each).

Move identification in this present research was based on the model revised by Chen and Kuo (2012) for analyzing the whole thesis in Applied Linguistics. This revised framework is the complete move-step framework for analyzing each chapter of a thesis and it has a new independent move of *Referring to other studies* in each chapter, which is absent from all previous move-step studies. In addition to its completeness, this framework is the direct result of the investigation of the whole M.A. thesis in Applied Linguistics, which is very close to TESOL, the field under the focus of this study. Therefore, this framework is expected to be applicable for the move-step identification of the corpus of 24 TESOL M.A. theses in Vietnam.

Analyzing a genre in the ESP tradition, the researchers began by 1) identifying the moves and steps, either compulsory or optional, in relation to the overall communicative purpose, and 2) investigating how these moves and steps were ordered. After the moves and steps were identified, their frequency in each chapter of theses was recorded in order to verify the extent to which a particular move or step is used. The criteria suggested by Kanoksilapatham (2005) were employed for classifying the frequency of the moves and steps found in this thesis corpus. According to the criteria, if a particular move or step occurs in every thesis (100%), it is classified as “obligatory”. If a move or step is found below 60% in the corpus, it is regarded as “optional” and if the occurrence of a certain move or step ranges from 60-99%, it is “conventional”. It is possible to find new moves and steps; however, they are not considered as new move(s)-step(s) unless they are present in 50% of the corpus (Nwogu, 1997). Since move analysis involves a certain degree of subjectivity (Crookes, 1986), inter-raters were employed in this study in order to ensure the reliability of the findings. Two researchers, who hold a doctoral degree and specialize in corpus-based analysis, analyzed the texts in this corpus separately before checking their results against each other, yielding high inter-rater reliability rates (95%). Finally, the findings of moves and steps from this corpus were then compared with Chen and Kuo’s framework (2012) in order to see to what extent the moves and steps constructed by Vietnamese are different from or similar to those produced by international writers.

3. Findings

3.1 Findings on the Overall Structure of Theses

The preliminary findings on the text partitioning of theses revealed more differences than similarities to those in Chen and Kuo (2012) (Table 3.1). First, there is a wider range in the total number of running words in Chen and Kuo's theses than those in the current corpus. Moreover, while only 15 out of 20 theses in Chen and Kuo were organized in the conventional Introduction-LiteratureReview-Methods-Results-Discussion-Conclusion (ILrMRDC) pattern (Paltridge, 2002a; Swales, 2004), all 24 theses in the current corpus followed this pattern. Similarly, the headings were reported to be present in only 13 theses in Chen and Kuo while 24 theses in the present study had separate headings for each chapter and section. Furthermore, the Literature Review (LR) chapters in their corpus were found to be embedded in four out of 15 theses with an ILrMRDC pattern. In the TESOL thesis corpus, 13 out of these 24 theses had Results, Discussions and Conclusions as three separate chapters, resulting in a six-chapter thesis. These textual characteristics may be due to these Vietnamese writers' compliance to the university guidelines provided. It is also interesting to note that two thirds of Chen and Kuo's thesis corpus had a separate section for teaching recommendations in either Discussion or Conclusion chapters while all but one TESOL theses contained this section and all were in the Conclusion chapters. However, this communicative purpose was identified under different section headings (*Recommendations* and *Pedagogical Implications*, six and 17 theses, respectively). It is clear that although guidelines were provided, variations still exist in the surface structures of theses composed by this group of Vietnamese writers.

Table 3.1: Text divisions between Chen and Kuo's (2012) and TESOL M.A. theses

Corpus	Running words	Average	Range	ILrMRDC	Chapter & Section headings	Pedagogical implications
Chen & Kuo's (ProQuest)	374,289	24,953	7,627-44,775	15	13	10
TESOL theses (Vietnam)	490,666	20,444	8,118-33,466	24	24	23

3.2 Similarities

As can be seen in Table 3.2, Introduction and Method moves were found to be obligatory in Abstracts of both thesis corpora while Conclusion move is conventional. However, this

Conclusion move occurred with a higher percentage, 84.3% of the 24 TESOL M.A. theses while it was present in 53.3% of the 15 theses from ProQuest. Besides move structures, similar findings to those of Chen and Kuo's (2012) are a linear structure of Introduction-Method-Result-Conclusion and an infrequent occurrence of move cycling in the corpus of TESOL M.A. theses.

Table 3.2: Similarities between TESOL M.A. theses and those from ProQuest

<p>Abstracts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A linear structure of Introduction-Method-Result-Conclusion ✓ Scarcity of move cycling ✓ <i>Introduction & Method</i> Moves: obligatory ✓ <i>Conclusion</i> Move: conventional
<p>Introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Move1 (T)-Move2 (N)-Move3 (O) ✓ <i>Topic generalization & background</i> (highest percentage) ✓ <i>Gap/Need indicating</i> (most frequent) ✓ No <i>Counter-claiming</i> ✓ <i>Referring to previous studies</i>
<p>Literature Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Thematic sections with Introduction-Body-Conclusion structures ✓ <i>Introductions</i> and <i>Conclusions</i>: conventional ✓ No headings for introduction texts ✓ CARS three moves structures in Body parts ✓ Predominance of <i>Non-related research reviewing</i> and <i>Research-related reviewing</i> (Move 1) ✓ Few instances of <i>Counter-claiming</i> ✓ Presence of <i>Concluding a part of literature review</i>
<p>Methodology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Presence of all 5 moves ✓ A linear structure of the first four moves ✓ Moves 1-2: obligatory ✓ Move 4 occurring less frequently than the first three moves ✓ Indicating chapter/section introduction: obligatory ✓ Describing the sample: obligatory ✓ Absence of <i>Previewing Results</i>
<p>Results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Moves 1-2: obligatory ✓ Move 3: conventional ✓ Move 4: optional
<p>Discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Few instances of Moves 5-7 and <i>Referring to previous studies</i> ✓ Move 3: cyclical ✓ Most frequent cycles: <i>Reporting major findings-Interpreting</i>; <i>Reporting major findings-Interpreting-Accounting</i>; and <i>Reporting major findings-Comparing</i>
<p>Conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Prevalence of the first four Moves ✓ Moves 1, 3 and <i>Referring to other studies</i>: optional ✓ A linear structure of moves and steps ✓ Conventional steps: <i>Summarizing the study briefly</i>, <i>Indicating limitations</i>, <i>Recommending future research</i>, <i>Drawing pedagogical implications</i>

Regarding Introductions, twenty four chapters (100%) had all the three moves as suggested in Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework: *Establishing a Territory* (T), *Establishing a Niche* (N), and *Occupying the Niche* (O). This can be explained by the fact that these writers simply followed

the guidelines for thesis writing provided by their universities. In these guidelines, Move 1 is expected to be completed in the section headed “*Background to the study*”. “*Rationale of the study*” is where the niche for their current study is expected to be established while “*Statement of purpose, Research questions/Hypotheses, Significance of the study and Overview of thesis chapters*” are Move 3’s components. This conformity to the model is likely to reflect how Vietnamese have been trained at school where conforming to the norms, formula or patterns have been employed. Similar to Chen and Kuo (2012), *providing topic generalization/background* had the highest frequency (35 occurrences) in 22 Introductions, followed by *Referring to other studies*. Another common finding with Chen and Kuo’s (2012) found in the current thesis corpus was the frequent use of the steps *indicating a gap in previous research*, and *indicating a problem or need for research* for establishing the niche (Move 2) and no writers used *counter-claiming*. This similarity seems to indicate how these steps in Move 2 were employed by M.A. thesis writers. Finally, despite the presence of the independent move in 23 Introductions, these Vietnamese writers’ narrative writing styles in referencing to other previous works in their Introductions tend to reflect the characteristic of student writing. In fact, as indicated by Petrić (2007), M.A. students’ references to previous studies only help to show their familiarity with the knowledge of the topic in the literature while in published writing, any mention of sources is related to the writer’s own argumentation.

Except a new step (*Concluding a part of literature review and/or indicating transition to review of a different area*) in Move 2, the framework for the analysis of the rhetorical structure of LR chapters revised by Chen and Kuo (2012) is identical to the original one by Kwan (2006). In the current LR chapters, it is interesting to see the inclusion of an Introduction-Body-Conclusion structure and several thematic sections in the body part, as described in Chen and Kuo’s (2012) framework, with a high frequency although this information was not indicated in the guidelines provided by the universities. In addition, similar to Chen and Kuo’s (2012) finding, this study also found a short text at the beginning of 23 (out of 24) LR chapters which informs the reader of the purposes, structures, themes and justifications for the themes to be reviewed in the following sections, but 19 do not have the heading “*Introductions*”. Moreover, this study also identified the CARS three move structure as indicated by Kwan (2006) and found in Chen and Kuo (2012). Another similar finding in LR chapters between Chen and Kuo (2012) and the current corpus is the same pattern of the move frequency distribution identified in the body parts of these LR chapters. In particular, the most frequent occurrences of Move 1 with two

steps *Non-related research reviewing* and *Research-related reviewing*, about five times higher than those in Ph.D. dissertations by Kwan (2006) (13.56% and 2.36%, respectively), tends to show that these M.A. students are trying to display their familiarity with the knowledge in their field, without synthesizing or indicating the relevancy of the reviewed literature (Move 2) for establishing the niche and occupying the niche (Move 3). In addition to this, *Counter-claiming* was used the least in Move 2 of the LR chapters of these two thesis corpora while this strategy was the most frequently used in Kwan's (2006) Ph.D. LR chapters. This difference could be due to the different orientations and scopes between Ph.D. dissertations and M.A. theses. As indicated by Koutsantoni (2006), due to the awareness of M.A. students' inferior status to the examiners and previous scholars, their avoidance of claiming the weaknesses of previous studies is predictable. Furthermore, it is interesting to note here that although Strategy *Concluding a part of literature review and/or indicating transition to review of a different area* was newly identified and added by Chen and Kuo (2012), this strategy, which is just a few lines long, is the most frequently used strategy (34.88%) in Move 2 of the current LR chapters. The prominent presence of this concluding step and the introductory text given at the beginning of a new theme, tends to reflect the established practice of following an Introduction-Body-Conclusion pattern in composing an academic text by these Vietnamese students (Phan, 2011).

With regard to the Method chapters, it was found that these chapters included all the suggested elements in the guidelines provided by the universities. They had all five moves identified in the Method chapters of Applied Linguistics theses from ProQuest (Chen & Kuo, 2012) and the first four moves had a linear pattern while the independent move (*Referring to other studies*) was present in all these four moves. Moreover, the first two moves (*Introducing the Method chapter* and *Describing data collection method and procedure(s)*) and the independent move were obligatory while Moves 3 and 4 were conventional and optional, respectively. Move 1 (*Introducing the Method chapter*) and *Chapter summary*, which are not provided in the guidelines by these universities with a TESOL M.A. program, occurred in 100% and 79% of this Method chapter corpus, respectively. In fact, all Method chapters in this corpus started with an indication of the chapter structure (*Introducing the chapter structure*), an overview of the reported study (*Providing an overview of the study*) and the research design (*Indicating theory/approach*), and 19 ended with the summary of the chapter. Regarding the steps, *Describing methods and steps in data collection* and *Describing the sample* (Move 2) were found to be compulsory and this finding is in line with Chen and Kuo's (2012) who claim that Applied Linguistics writers of their thesis corpus tend to focus on the samples, the procedures

and methods of data collection. Another commonality between these two M.A. thesis corpora is the much-less-frequent occurrence of Move 4 as compared with the first three moves. Furthermore, there was a complete absence of *Previewing results* in the current Method chapter corpus. Although Chen and Kuo's (2012) account the absence of this step in their Method chapters for its inclusion in the Results chapters, the complete absence of *Previewing results* in those of TESOL M.A. theses could be due to the guidelines provided by the universities. In fact, according to the guidelines, a thesis Method chapter should tell readers "WHEN", "WHERE", and "HOW" the study was carried out, but not a brief review of findings.

In the Results chapters, the first two moves (*Introducing the Results chapter* and *Reporting results*) were obligatory in the current corpus of 13 Results chapters of TESOL M.A. theses in Vietnam. Moreover, while Move 3 (*Commenting on results*) and Move 4 (*Summarizing results*) were found in nine and five results chapters (69% and 38.5%, respectively), there tended to be a complete absence of Move 5 (*Evaluating the study*) and Move 6 (*Deductions from the study*) in the corpus. Although these findings are not in line with that of Yang and Allison (2003) which indicated that the Moves 2 and 3 of the Results sections of RAs are obligatory, they support Chen and Kuo's (2012), in which the first two moves were found to be present in all theses. This similarity could be accounted by the same target genre, i.e., master's thesis, between the two corpora while RAs are the target genre in Yang and Allison (2003).

Regarding the Discussion chapters, Move 3 (*Summarizing results*) and Move 4 (*Commenting on results*) were found in every chapter with a high frequency of occurrence. A closer look at these two moves revealed that interpretations, explanations, and/or evaluations were provided for each main result summarized, which makes these two moves cyclical. This finding on the move cycle confirmed that of Chen and Kuo (2012), which reported that Move 4 often accompanies Move 3 with a high frequency. Moreover, it was observed that all moves in these Discussion chapters followed the order of the moves in the framework, except the independent move of *Referring to other studies* because this move was found to be intertwined with Move 4 (*Commenting on results*). The analysis of sequence patterns of steps showed that *Making conclusions of results* was always followed by *Interpreting results*, and/or *Comparing results with literature/Accounting for results*, making the highest average occurrence per chapter. The highest frequency of these cycles identified in this corpus written by Vietnamese confirmed that of international writers (Chen & Kuo, 2012) and this commonality suggests that M.A. thesis

writers mainly interpret the reported findings through previous research references in their Discussions.

In the Conclusion chapters, Move 4 (*Deductions from the research study*) was identified as an obligatory move as each chapter contained at least one element of this move. The other moves were conventional and optional. Although the prevalent presence of the first four moves in the Conclusion chapters of the current corpus is in line with the finding of Chen and Kuo (2012), no obligatory moves were found in the M.A. theses written by international writers. However, the presence of Move 4 in all of these Conclusion chapters could be explained by the complete absence of this move in the previous concluding chapters; namely, Results and Discussions. It is likely that the Conclusion chapters are the only place where these thesis writers in Vietnam made recommendations and suggestions for students, teachers and administrators and for future work, based on the results of their studies. In terms of move cycles, similar to Chen and Kuo's (2012) and Yang and Allison's (2003), the results of this study revealed that these Conclusion chapters had a linear structure. In fact, while the majority of writers (83%) opened the last chapter of their theses with the chapter introduction (with and without section headings), four began their chapters with summaries of main findings. Following the chapter introductory section were summaries of main findings, pedagogical implications, limitations of the study, and recommendation for further study. They all ended the chapters with elements of Move 4 (*Deductions from the study*) and more than half of them (58%) closed with a chapter summary (with and without the headings) or a brief review of the whole study.

3.3 Differences

Table 3.3 summarizes the differences in the move-step structures of M.A. theses composed by Vietnamese students and those by international writers from ProQuest in order to completely answer the research question. As can be seen in the table, the differences found in each chapter of these two corpora are point by point presented.

Table 3.3: Differences between TESOL M.A. theses and those from ProQuest

TESOL M.A. (Vietnam)	Chen & Kuo's (ProQuest)
Abstracts	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Twice longer (265 words) ✓ <i>Result Move</i>: conventional ✓ Presence of <i>gap indicating, research questions and hypothesis, significance of the study and suggestions for future studies</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 164 words ✓ <i>Result Move</i>: obligatory ✓ Absence of these steps
Introductions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ T-N-O (45.8%) ✓ 19 steps ✓ Presence of <i>chapter introduction & summary and next chapter introduction</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ T-N-O (82%) ✓ 28 steps ✓ Absence of these steps
Literature Review	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All separate LR chapters ✓ Modular and nested structures ✓ Body: no obligatory moves. Moves 1-2: conventional; Move 3: optional ✓ Step 1A: optional ✓ Introductory texts at the beginning of Move 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 4 (out of 15) embedded LR chapters ✓ Modular structures ✓ Body: Move 1 (obligatory) ✓ Steps 1A-B: obligatory ✓ Absence of this step in Move 1
Methodology	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Generic section headings and subheadings ✓ <i>Chapter summary</i>: Newly-identified move with two conventional steps: <i>Summarizing the chapter and Introducing the next chapter content</i> ✓ Highest frequency step: <i>Describing the sample</i> ✓ High frequency of three-step sequence: <i>Instruments-Purposes-Justifications</i> ✓ <i>Describing methods and steps in data collection</i>: conventional ✓ <i>Justifying data collection procedure; Referring to other studies to provide background information</i>: optional ✓ Absence of step <i>Explaining variables and variable measurement</i> ✓ <i>Referring to other studies</i>: compulsory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ No generic section headings and subheadings ✓ No <i>Chapter summary</i> ✓ Highest frequency step: <i>Describing methods and steps in data collection</i> ✓ Few instances of three-step sequences and justifications for the whole data collection procedures ✓ <i>Describing methods and steps in data collection</i>: obligatory ✓ <i>Justifying data collection procedure; Referring to other studies to provide support and justification; Referring to other studies to provide background information</i>: conventional ✓ Newly-added step <i>Explaining variables and variable measurement</i> ✓ <i>Referring to other studies</i>: conventional
Results	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Presence of <i>previous chapter summary, chapter summary and introduction of the next chapter content</i> ✓ Obligatory cycles: <i>Locating graphics-Reporting major findings</i> ✓ Highest frequency cycles: <i>Locating graphics-Reporting major findings</i> ✓ Newly-identified steps: <i>section introduction and each section summary</i> ✓ Only two three-step sequence patterns (<i>Methods-Graphics-Findings</i> and <i>Graphics-Findings-Interpreting</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Absence of these steps ✓ Obligatory cycles: <i>Reporting major findings-providing background or indicating how results are presented</i> ✓ Highest frequency cycles: <i>Reporting major findings-Interpreting results</i> ✓ Absence of these steps ✓ Presence of six three-step sequence patterns with high frequency (<i>Background-Findings-Interpreting; Graphics-Findings-Interpreting; Methods-Findings-Interpreting; Graphics-Findings-Methods; Findings-Interpreting-Comparing; Methods-Findings-Graphics and Methods-Graphics-Findings</i>)
Discussions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Moves 3-4: obligatory ✓ Compulsory step: <i>Making conclusions of results (Move 3); Interpreting results</i> ✓ Conventional steps: <i>Accounting for results; Providing background information and how discussions are presented and Referring to other studies for</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Move 2: obligatory ✓ Compulsory step: <i>Reporting major findings</i> ✓ Conventional steps: <i>Interpreting results; Accounting for results; Providing background information and how discussions are presented; Referring to other studies for</i>

<p><i>support/justification</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Highest frequency cycles: <i>Making conclusions of results- Interpreting results</i> ✓ Few instances of three-step sequence patterns ✓ <i>Chapter summary</i>: A newly-identified move with two steps: <i>Summarizing the chapter</i> (conventional) and <i>Introducing the next chapter content</i> (optional) ✓ Presence of newly-identified steps, <i>section introduction</i> and <i>each section summary</i>; but with low frequency 	<p><i>support/justification</i> and <i>Making conclusions of results</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Highest frequency cycles: <i>Reporting major findings- Interpreting results</i> ✓ A great number of three-step sequence patterns ✓ No <i>Chapter summary</i> <p>✓ Absence of these steps</p>
Conclusions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Move 4: obligatory ✓ Moves 1-2: conventional ✓ Step <i>How the chapter is presented</i>: conventional ✓ <i>Chapter summary</i>: A newly identified move ✓ Presence of newly-identified steps, but with low frequency: <i>summarizing previous chapter, next section introduction</i> and <i>each section summary</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ No obligatory moves ✓ Moves 2-4: conventional ✓ Step <i>How the chapter is presented</i>: optional ✓ No <i>Chapter summary</i> ✓ Absence of these steps

As can be seen in Table 3.3, the Abstracts in TESOL M.A. corpus in Vietnam were almost twice longer than those from ProQuest. This is accounted for one-paragraph allocation for each move found in 15 theses in this corpus. This finding tends to reflect the disciplinary distinctiveness of the soft discipline that these TESOL M.A. theses belong to, as indicated in Hyland (2000). Furthermore, different from Chen and Kuo's (2012) finding, the Results move was conventional in this current corpus because one abstract (A23) did not have this move. Moreover, it is interesting to find that six abstracts in the current corpus (25%) indicated the gap in Introduction move and this step was followed by the purpose step. Although gap-indicating is supposed to reflect the way skilled writers write, it tends to be absent in M.A. theses from ProQuest. This could be due to the fact that as Chen and Kuo (2012) reported the rhetorical structures of the whole M.A. theses, not all findings were presented in detail. Another interesting finding that tended to show these Vietnamese writers' inexperience in writing their abstracts is the presence of Hypothesis, Research Questions and Scope in three abstracts (12.5%). Given a limited number of words in an abstract as a synopsis (Bhatia, 1993) and an advance indicator of the content and structure of the accompanying text (Swales, 1990), the presence of these elements seems to be inappropriate.

While 82% of Chen and Kuo's thesis Introductions had a single progression of Move 1-Move 2-Move 3 (T-N-O), only 11 Introductions (45.8%) in the present corpus followed this move pattern, where the writers previewed previous research, and then pointed out gaps or problems, and finally went on to announce their own research in the following sections labeled *Statement of Purposes/Aims & Objectives of the study, Research questions/Hypotheses, Significance of the study* and *Overview of thesis chapters*". The sequence of moves T-N, followed by either T-O or

T-N-O was identified in the other 13 Introductions in the corpus. This practice of move cycles corresponds to the literature which states that the moves in the Introduction chapters are cyclical (Bunton, 2002; Crookes, 1986). In terms of steps, 19 out of 28 steps described in Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework for M.A. thesis Introductions were identified in this corpus. The highly frequently used steps (almost 100%) were those with the headings suggested in the guidelines by the universities and they were the obligatory steps in this corpus of M.A thesis Introduction chapters. *Chapter summary*, which is not included in Chen and Kuo's (2012), was found in two Introductions (I15 and I19). The presence of this new step in two Introductions, altogether with a text introducing the chapter (*Chapter structure*), may reflect the tendency for the three-part structure of an academic essay (Introduction-Body-Conclusion) that these writers used to follow at their university study. However, this step is not identified as a new step because it was found in only two Introductions.

Different from Chen and Kuo's (2012) finding that 11 out of 15 theses with an ILrMRDC pattern in their corpus separated the LR chapter from the Introduction, all TESOL M.A. theses in the current corpus had a separate LR chapter. The difference could be due to these writers' compliance to the guidelines for thesis writing provided by their universities. In fact, a TESOL M.A. thesis in Vietnam is required to have chapters separated, except for Discussions which can be either separate or combined with the Results or Conclusion chapters. Besides the difference in the overall structure of the LR chapters, the majority of the concluding texts (15 out of 19 LR chapters) in the current corpus were entitled with either "*Summary*" or "*Conclusion*" and the longest one occupies three whole pages. Although all of concluding texts in 19 LR chapters provided the chapter summary, 10 had at least one count of Move 3; namely, the gap, aim, and theoretical framework, and seven texts (almost one third) even provided an advance indicator of the next chapter (Example 1). The presence of Move 3 at some LR chapter endings in this thesis corpus suggests the presence of two modes of theme arrangements: "modular and nested move structures" in the LR chapters of theses written by Vietnamese (Kwan, 2006, p. 51).

(1) **"2.9. SUMMARY**

To construct a base for the study, this chapter has discussed briefly the two basic notions: CLT and communicative competence.... The chapter then provides a model of CLT synthesized from the theories of Richards & Rodgers (2001) and Larsen-Freeman (2004). On that ground, the conceptual framework of the study has been refined.

A detailed discussion of the research instruments, the participants, the research methodology as well as data analysis methods, as employed in the study, are presented in the next chapter." (LR7)

Regarding the body texts, although the CARS three-move structure was found, none of these three moves are obligatory, but conventional (Moves 1 and 2) and optional (Move 3) in the current LR chapters while Move 1 was found to be obligatory in all 11 LR chapters with an ILrMRDC pattern in Chen and Kuo's (2012). Furthermore, the findings on the body parts of the LR chapters in the current corpus revealed interesting information. That is twenty two thematic units (18.64%) began their parts with an advance introduction of the subthemes and their organization (Example 2). This opening part at the beginning of these themes is similar to the introductory section at the very beginning of a LR chapter because it provided a justification and subthemes to be reviewed in the accompanying texts. This special feature in writing the body part of the LR chapters is likely to make these chapters recursive, but in sub-levels and it is not indicated by either Kwan (2006) or Chen and Kuo (2012).

(2) "2.3. *Reading strategies*

In order to see through the aspects of reading strategies as the fundamentals of the study, there are necessary considerations to be taken into account. In this section, therefore, the researcher mentions the definitions of reading strategies, reading strategies of high-proficiency and low-proficiency readers, the instruction of reading strategies, and the classification of reading strategies

2.3.1. *Definitions of reading strategies*' (LR17)

The Method chapters in the current thesis corpus were divided into sections or subsections with generic headings, which were not mentioned in Chen and Kuo's (2012). The employment of generic section headings and subheadings in these Method chapters written by Vietnamese tends to make it fairly easy for the moves and steps in the text to be identified. In fact, by reading the headings and subheadings used in these chapters, readers would understand the type of research approaches/methods or instruments used in the reported study. The sufficiently frequent use of these discourse and linguistic markers/clues in the Method chapters by these Vietnamese writers is similar to Indonesians who published their RAs in their national journals (Safnil, 2013). The limited readership could explain for their similarity in using the generic section headings and subheadings in the Method chapters/sections. Different from Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework, the presence of *Chapter summary* in this M.A. corpus is considered as a new move since it was identified in 19 theses. However, the presence of the steps *Summarizing the Method chapter* (79%) and *Introducing the content of the next chapter* (62.5%) in this last move (Example 3) suggests that they are conventional in this thesis corpus.

(3) "3.8. *SUMMARY*

This chapter has presented and evaluated the methodology used to investigate teachers' attitudes towards the theory of CLT, learners' attitudes towards the practice of CLT, and the application of CLT at FLC-USSH. A descriptive research design, including both qualitative and quantitative methods, was employed. Data were

collected from questionnaires, interviews and direct-classroom observation. The analysis of data collected are presented and discussed in the next chapter.” (T7)

Similar to the findings on the previous chapter analyses, the presence of both chapter introduction and chapter summary in the Method chapters of these theses reflects the distinctive practice of organizing each chapter in the TESOL discourse community in Vietnam. In *Describing the sample*, the detailed information about the location, the sample characteristics, and the time when the reported study was conducted was provided in the Method chapters of these TESOL M.A. theses. Besides the detailed description on the subjects, careful descriptions on the steps, purposes and justifications were given for each data collection method/instrument (Example 4), suggesting that the methods and steps in data collection in the current thesis corpus are likely to be more elaborate than those in Chen and Kuo (2012). In fact, the independent move of *Referring to other studies* with its predominant communicative purpose of *Providing support or justification* for the chosen methods of data collection and analysis was obligatory in the TESOL M.A. thesis corpus in Vietnam while it is conventional in Chen and Kuo (2012). This difference is explained by the fact that in Chen and Kuo’s, justifications were provided for the whole data collection procedure while only three theses (12.50%) in the current corpus contained this step.

(4) “3.4.1. *Survey questionnaire to students*

This study was designed to investigate metacognitive reading strategies. Since most reading strategies were unobservable, a questionnaire was developed as a major research instrument in order to elicit data from subjects. Anderson (1990) approved that the questionnaire had become one of the most useful means of collecting information. Thus, the data for this study were collected through a questionnaire adapted from the survey of reading strategies (SORS).” (T17)

The newly-added step *Explaining variables and variable measurement* by Chen and Kuo (2012) in their corpus was absent in the thesis corpus written by Vietnamese students. This could be due to the fact that the explanations, the item specifications in the questionnaire and methods of measuring data collected were previously presented in the step *Explaining specific method(s) of data analysis*.

All 13 separate Results chapters in TESOL M.A. theses started with the chapter introduction, which provided either some background information of the research topic/the Results chapter structure or/and methods/instruments or statistical procedures and four of which even had a section heading for this communicative purpose. This introduction section was followed by several cycles of the research findings, which was in turn followed by some instances of result comments (Move 3) and result summaries (Move 4). These several research-finding cycles

were identified in the corpus because these Vietnamese writers presented the findings according to their research questions or their employed research instruments. However, it is interesting to note the newly identified steps that preceded or followed these main-move cycles in this study. In fact, five of these 13 chapters (R4, R9, R14, R20 and R21) were found to begin with the previous chapter summary, and four (R9, R14, R20 and R21) ended with the chapter summary and an introduction of the next chapter content (R9 and R21). It is also worth mentioning here that when a chapter started with a brief summary of the previous chapter, it is likely that it would end with a summary of the chapter (except R4). This tendency could reflect the writers' intention in connecting all chapters in their theses together and this practice reflects the distinctive practice of organizing each chapter in the TESOL discourse community in Vietnam. Due to their average frequency of occurrences in these result chapters (38% and 31%, respectively), they are not recorded as new moves based on Nwogu (1997).

Regarding steps in these Results chapters, two steps in Move 2 (*Locating graphics* and *Reporting major findings*) occurred with the highest frequency in all 13 theses, making these two steps obligatory and have the highest cycle in these Results chapters. However, in comparison with the steps found in Chen and Kuo (2012), the cycle of *Reporting major findings* (Move 2)-*Interpreting results* (Move 3) accounted for the highest frequency of steps. This cyclical difference between these two groups of writers revealed that in the texts written by international writers, adequate interpretation was provided while a majority of findings reported by Vietnamese were preceded or followed by tables or graphs. Finally, three steps, which were not included in Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework, were newly identified in this Results chapter corpus. These steps were found at the beginning of Move 2 (*Reporting results*) which aims to present the structure of how a section (each main finding) was reported (*section introduction*), and after Move 3 (*Commenting on results*) when the writers summarized the section (*summary of each section*) and introduced the next section content (*next section introduction*). These three steps formed a sub-cycle in some Results chapters of the corpus as shown in Example 5. Despite the occurrence of "*next section introduction*" found in 23% of these 13 Results chapters, two steps "*section introduction*" and "*summary of each section*" occurred in more than 50% (53.8% and 76.9%). Therefore, these two steps are classified as new steps in the Results chapters of the current thesis corpus.

(5) 4.2. *Results of the questionnaire to teacher respondents*

As shown in the earlier framework of analysis, the data provided from the questionnaire to teacher respondents was divided into three small sections for analysis. The results of the first section are presented as below. (section introduction)

Generally speaking, in the process of teaching vocabulary to elementary adult learners at this center, teachers could run into seven major difficulties originated from their learners. The most considerable difficulty was ...The second major problem reported was. ... The third problematic things Above all, ... (section summary)
In addition to the major difficulties derived from learners found in section A, section B of this questionnaire was also specially designed to find out possible difficulties that teachers might encounter from themselves. The data included in section B was analyzed and interpreted as follows. (next section introduction)

Section B - Difficulties arising from teachers. ... (R8)

Among 13 separately presented Discussion chapters, only three (T9, T20 and T21) had a separate heading (Discussions) while the rest was found under the combined headings of Results-Discussion and Discussion-Conclusions (eight and two, respectively). These combined headings could account for the complete absence of Move 2 (*Reporting results*) in these Discussion chapters while Move 3 (*Summarizing results*) and Move 4 (*Commenting on results*) occurred in every text, making them the obligatory moves in these chapters. This finding, however, is different from those of Chen and Kuo (2012) and Yang and Allison (2003), which find that the Discussion chapters not only summarize results, comment on results, and compare them with previous studies in the field but also report results. The absence of Move 2 in these Discussion chapters tends to reflect these writers' conscious choice in separating results from discussions although they were presented under the same heading in a majority of these (61.5%). In terms of steps, two steps of Moves 3 and 4; namely, *Making conclusions of results* and *Interpreting results*, respectively, were obligatory. Moreover, while *Accounting for results* and *Providing background information and how discussions are presented* (Move 1) were conventional, *Comparing results with literature* was optional. Similar to the findings in the Results chapters, *Chapter summary* was found in nine out of 13 Discussion chapters, accounting for 69% of the theses with a separate Discussion chapter and two of these had a section heading for this communicative purpose. This newly identified text should be regarded as a new move because it was employed to summarize the content of the whole chapter, and four even introduced the content of the next chapter. According to move definitions by Swales (1981) and Holmes (1997), this text at the end of the chapter not only performs a specific communicative function of its own but also contributes to the overall communicative purpose of the genre. In fact, in relation to Move 1, which aims to open the Discussion chapter as stated by Chen and Kuo's (2012), this newly identified move, *Chapter summary*, was employed to close the chapter. Besides *Chapter summary*, another two new steps; namely, *Section introduction* and *Section summary*, were found in two and five Discussion chapters, respectively, and they were not considered as new steps in these Discussion chapters.

Finally, Move 4 (*Deductions from the study*) was found to be present in every Conclusion chapter of the current thesis corpus. Besides future research recommendations, its main communicative purposes were seen to provide meticulous descriptions for teachers, students and administrators to improve the practice of learning and teaching English of their schools as each research topic was required to be an experimental or descriptive investigation into practical problems that teachers and students were having. Frequency analysis of steps revealed that *How the chapter is presented* was the most frequent step with a high percentage, making it conventional in this Conclusion chapter corpus. However, this finding is not in line with that in Chen and Kuo (2012). The prominent occurrence of this step at the beginning of the chapter tends to reflect the Vietnamese writing pattern, which follows the three-part structure of “Introduction-Body-Conclusion” despite the fact that it is not included in the guidelines. Furthermore, due to its presence in more than 50% of the Conclusion chapter corpus, “*Chapter summary*” was classified as a new move as suggested by Nwogu (1997).

4. Conclusions

This study attempted to make a comparison on the rhetorical structures of the whole M.A. theses written by Vietnamese and international writers from ProQuest. Employing Chen and Kuo’s (2012) framework for analyzing each chapter of 24 TESOL M.A. theses, the results of the study revealed both similarities and differences between these two thesis corpora. Regarding the overall structure of theses, all 24 theses in the current corpus followed the conventional ILrMRDC structure while three quarters of Chen and Kuo’s (2012) employed this pattern. The guidelines provided by their universities could explain for this difference. Besides the difference in the overall structures, theses in these two corpora shared the commonalities in having a separate section for pedagogical implications, which reflects the distinctive feature of applied linguistics (Yang & Allison, 2003). With respect to the chapters, the similarities identified tend to reflect the characteristics of theses composed by M.A. students. In particular, there tends to be a linear structure of moves-steps employed in achieving the communicative purposes of each chapter. Moreover, it is likely to indicate that M.A. theses are less elaborate as compared to doctoral dissertations due to the absence of *Counter-claiming* in Introductions and predominance of *Non-related research reviewing* and *Research-related reviewing* in LRs. Although it is argued that M.A. students are aware of the inferiority in avoiding criticizing previous researchers (Koutsantoni, 2006) and that displaying their familiarity with the literature is sufficient for M.A. thesis writers (Petrić, 2007), they should also be made aware of other

strategies that can be used to make their theses more convincing. With respect to differences, the prominent disparity between these two M.A. thesis corpora is the frequent presence of the cycle “*chapter/section introduction-chapter/section summary-next chapter/section introduction*”. This move/step sequence not only reflects the three-part structures of Vietnamese written discourse (Phan, 2011) but also the conventional practice in this TESOL discourse community. Furthermore, the length of abstracts, the inclusion of research questions/hypotheses in abstracts, the infrequency of T-N-O sequence in Introductions and few instances of comments on findings in the Results chapters are likely to indicate these Vietnamese writers’ inexperience in composing each thesis chapter. Besides these, the presence of *Deduction from the study* (Move 4) in all 24 Conclusion chapters also indicates the nature of theses produced in the TESOL discourse community in Vietnam.

Despite the small scale and local scope of the study and lack of follow-up interviews with thesis writers and thesis supervisors, our findings, to a certain extent, can provide a comprehensive picture of how Vietnamese students compose their M.A. theses in English. Moreover, this study also responds to the need for more studies and investigation on the texts generated by students (Dudley-Evans, 1999; Thompson, 1999), especially on those produced by non-native English writers. As writing a thesis in English is challenging for non-native English speaking students (Dong, 1998; Paltridge, 2002b; Shaw, 1991), this group of Vietnamese writers should be formally instructed on how to compose it. As stated by previous scholars (Bhatia, 1993; Huang, 2014; Hyland, 2000, 2007; Swales, 1990), explicit genre instruction on rhetorical moves and linguistic features helps shape novice non-native English writers’ knowledge of writing for scientific papers.

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