

# Academic style and format of doctoral theses: The case of the disappearing discussion chapter

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## Abstract

This article describes work carried out within the sphere of analysis of university academic discourse that possibly contains an intercultural comparative element. A hypothesis was put forward that when Spanish doctoral students crafted their theses, they would pass over the Discussion chapter and progress directly on to the Conclusions. The propensity for Spanish doctoral students to miss out discussion of the results in their doctoral theses was noticed by the first author, while supervising her own doctoral students' empirical Ph.D. theses in the field of English Studies in Spain. It was thought that this oversight may indicate intercultural variation in the preferences of format for different writing cultures. The initial corpus consisted of sixteen theses from the field of English Studies. At a second stage, an additional corpus of thirty-nine theses in the field of Spanish Studies was included. Both corpora had been defended in these two areas in Spanish universities over the last 10 years and were full-text theses from a Spanish national data base: *Dialnet*. The results confirmed the hypothesis in both corpora with students in Spanish universities. Nevertheless, curiously, a number of further intervening variables were also found to be essential. For the theses from the area of Spanish Studies less divergence was encountered but, on the other hand, evidence was found that may even point to a lingering influence of national or educational rhetoric.

**Keywords:** genre analysis, discussion chapter, thesis writing, intervening variables, advanced academic literacy.

## Resumen

*Estilo académico y formato de tesis doctorales: El caso de la desaparición del capítulo de discusión (sección de debate académico)*

Este estudio se realizó en el marco de los análisis comparativos interculturales del

discurso académico universitario. El planteamiento inicial partía de una hipótesis sobre la frecuente omisión del capítulo denominado discusión por alumnos españoles al escribir sus tesis doctorales en el área de conocimiento de Filología Inglesa. La tendencia de los doctorandos españoles a suprimir este capítulo en sus tesis doctorales fue inicialmente observada por el primer autor de este estudio, mientras supervisaba las tesis de carácter empírico de sus alumnos dentro de este ámbito. Puede afirmarse que esta omisión se deba probablemente a una variación de origen cultural en la estructura de las preferencias de las diferentes tradiciones nacionales a la hora de escribir en esta modalidad de discurso académico. Para corroborar o rechazar esta hipótesis se realizó un estudio exploratorio inicial a nivel nacional. El corpus constaba de 16 textos completos de tesis del área de Filología Inglesa incluidos en bases de datos del país, fundamentalmente *Dialnet*. En una segunda fase, se incluyó un corpus de 39 tesis completas del área de Filología Española. Los resultados en ambos corpus confirmaron la hipótesis con los estudiantes de universidades españolas. Sin embargo, encontramos un número adicional de variables. Por ejemplo, en el caso de las tesis del área de Filología Española se hallaron menos variaciones y, sin embargo, se ha podido detectar una notable influencia de ciertos rasgos intrínsecos y tradicionales en la escritura académica española que proyectan sobre las tesis actuales una retórica nacional.

**Palabras clave:** análisis de género, capítulo de Discusión, redacción de tesis doctorales, variables intermedias, escritura académica avanzada.

## Introduction

The interest in pursuing the research found in this study was ignited by the first author's observation of the Discussion chapter while overseeing her doctoral students' empirical Ph.D. theses in the field of English Studies. This study offers a complementary analysis of research carried out by the first author in a preliminary version of this study presented in Brussels, Belgium (Hewitt, 2008) at the *Conference for University Discourses: Forms, practices and mutations*.

It was observed that the Discussion chapter in these theses seemed to be the most problematic for her Spanish students who were writing in English. In this instance more specifically, the Discussion chapter could not be regarded to be incorrectly merging the Results section with the Conclusions, because in effect the Discussion section was repeatedly omitted altogether. National or educational rhetoric can be hypothesised to account for these format preferences. The topic of Discussion chapters of theses within the area of

postgraduate literacy development will be examined here. Dudley-Evans (1997) recommended more research into the key genre of the thesis. He observed that little had been reported on how to write this genre, or how a thesis differs from a research article.

Various areas have been the focus of recent studies in academic discourse – those of the research discipline, national culture and the degree of expertise of the writer. Flottum, Dahl and Torrodd (2006) identify various influences on the academic author which include cultural identity, national identity, disciplinary identity and:

A fourth setting influencing the academic author is created by the discourse format and writing traditions used to present knowledge claims in concert with the discourse community representing the audience for the text. Mastering the relevant discourse forms may be said to be part of the socialisation process into the academic world in general and the discipline in question in particular (...) (Flottum, Dahl & Torrodd, 2006: 22).

These authors conclude that area or discipline results in a larger amount of differences than the factor of different culture. For example, the disciplines of linguistics and medicine represent opposite end points on a continuum. They found that the medical article is more rigorous in its use of the IMRD (“Introduction – Methodology – Research – Discussion”) format. In the field of cultural or contrastive rhetoric it was shown that differences in writing were due to culture or intercultural rhetoric. The diversity of the kinds of texts analysed in the volume by Connor, Nagelhout and William (2008), highlights that not only culture, but circumstances underlying the creation of specific text types (also called the “situated genre”) are important factors in any comparison of written discourse.

Martín Martín (2003) set out to establish the differences between research article abstracts written in English and those in Spanish. He found that the Spanish abstracts respected the IMRD structure followed by the English-speaking international academic community. Although, this piece of research made no mention of the inclusion of the Discussion section, Martín Martín concluded that the variation found between the two cultures’ research articles could be due to the differing beliefs that the Spanish and international academic communities hold.

Studies in the area of disciplinary discourse variation include those by Ken Hyland (2000 & 2004, among others). Hyland covered differences across

disciplines which mostly deal with research articles but also contain evidence and ideas about rhetorical and disciplinary variation. Hyland felt that matters stemming from local contexts had been neglected and so focuses on associations between the cultures behind academic communities and their textual practices.

In 2004 Swales observed that “a reasonable working assumption would be that the doctoral thesis or dissertation is lightly or only obscurely influenced by different national traditions” (Swales, 2004: 130). Here Swales contrasts this “light” influence with what he sees as the much heavier impact of a discipline specific conventions and expectations. Our observations seem to differ from this and point to theses which are quite heavily influenced by national tradition – that is to say the Spanish manner of omitting discussion of the results within research studies. It is our purpose to outline first the small amount of analyses about Discussion chapters found in the literature and then go on to describe our own original and empirical analysis of Ph.D. theses in order to be able to draw some conclusions about the observed phenomena in the field for Spain and Europe.

## Review of the literature

The Genre approach is useful for reviewing previous literature related to the current area. It draws upon up-to-date work into the rhetoric of the academic text as well as the linguistic examination of academic writing. Also useful is the research done into academic writing and we shall be reviewing both. There has, however, been very little research done into the structure of doctoral theses specifically (Dudley-Evans, 1997).

Relevant academic-writing history includes the well-known “moves” in Swales’ CARS model (Swales, 1990 – later adapted in his work of 2004). Swales’ original model concerned article Introductions and so will not be examined in detail here.

The moves reported below and Huckin’s (1987) work pointing to the importance of identifying and occupying an interesting niche show that Discussion sections in articles are different in shape from those in the Introduction. Discussion sections travel within a cycle and from an “inside-out” direction. They start with describing the results, next they situate them in the established literature and then they state their general importance. Nevertheless, further research is needed, for example in the variation in the

language used or the difference between academic disciplines. Specifically for the Discussion section, Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) suggested these moves in Figure 1 as characteristic.

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1. Background information
  2. Statement of results
  3. (Un)expected result
  4. Reference to previous research (comparison)
  5. Explanation of unsatisfactory result
  6. Exemplification
  7. Deduction and hypothesis (since modified to Claim 1)
  8. Reference to previous research (in support of a claim)
  9. Recommendation
  10. Justification
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Figure 1. Discussion section following Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988: 118).

An adaptation of the above work on the moves suggested for the Discussion section has been made by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995). They argue that the moves can be ordered into a set of higher level units. These moves are basically similar to those in the introduction, but are in opposing order, and are as shown in Figure 2.

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- Move 1 Occupying the niche
  - Move 2 (Re)establishing the field
  - Move 3 Establishing additional territory
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Figure 2. Discussion section following Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 41).

The work carried on subsequent to Swales (1981) reflects that discussions have a cyclical form, and both Peng (1987) and Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) had described systems containing ten or eleven moves. One of these moves consisted in repeating background information when an author wanted to bolster their discussion section and the author did this by going over the principal points.

Additionally, the intricacy of the cycle will depend upon the extent to which the author's results are consistent with former research or the expected results. Another, almost compulsory, move in the discussion section is what seems to be the outset position, the statement of results. This only seems to be superseded by Move 1 ("recapitulating the main points"). Some discussion sections have various parts, each of which begins with Move 2 ("statement of results"). Also common are discussion sections that begin with the strongest results and then proceed to weaker ones (Huckin, 1987).

Move 3 according to Swales (1990) concerns the description of an unexpected outcome, the finding of the outcome itself or if this outcome had been expected or not. This does not seem to be a very common move however, and in Peng's (1987) analysis only four out of 52 cycles included Move 3. Move 4, the most widespread move in discussion sections, concerns a reference to previous research. This either provides a comparison with, or support for, the present research in hand. Move 5 concerns an explanation – especially when coming across surprising results or those that contradict results already reported in the review of the literature section. Sometimes move 5 can come before move 3, or even replace it. According to Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) Move 6 concerns the setting out of examples in order to buoy up the justification. Move 7 makes a statement about how far the given results can be generalized. Move 8 contains the traditional call for future research, which however, seems to be disappearing as it apparently provides pointers to other competing researchers and an easy option for the former.

As additionally, it is also the Conclusions section that provides the basis for a study of the omission of the Discussion section. We will give a brief overview of previous work on the Conclusions Section given its relevance here. Bunton (2005) carried out research into the structure of the thesis Conclusions chapter. He found out that the Conclusions chapter reaffirmed purpose, consolidated research space with a variety of moves and steps, proposed future research and dealt with practical relevance. He also found that some Conclusions sections concentrated more on the field than on the thesis itself and also uncovered alternatives in focus and structure of the Conclusions chapter across disciplines. Swales (2004: 117) observed that: “Conclusions as opposed to Discussions, are typically an optional feature in RAs, but are expected in dissertations”. We have noticed that it is the Discussion that seems to be the optional feature in dissertations, which therefore miss out all of their moves and thus the presentation of all their corresponding information. Our experiences point to the presence of the lesser field orientated information because a Conclusion chapter was present.

Swales (2004: 107-108) comments on the relation of the results chapter with the discussion: “One particular problem is that having only a single chapter devoted to *results* produces an unwieldy and out-of-balance monster chapter in the middle of the text”. In his Figure 4.3 (Swales, 2004: 108) it is posited that one alternative to the huge results section may be that of various results

and various discussion sections. Thompson (1999 – see Figure 3) and his study on the complex research article suggests three Results and Discussions sections:

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Introduction (definitions, justifications, aims)  
 Literature Review (sometimes included in the Introduction)  
 (General Methods) (optional)  
 Results and discussion  
 Results and discussion  
 Results and discussion  
 Conclusions

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Figure 3. Complex article compilation following Thompson (1999: 48).

Bunton's (1998) work is mainly concerned with the concluding section of Ph.D. theses, but he also puts forward three discussion sections (see Figure 4). Therefore, the discussion section seems to be gaining importance in academia but at the same time is not present in Ph.D. theses in certain countries.

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Introduction  
 (Literature Review)  
 (Theoretical Framework)  
 Method  
 Topic: Analysis- Discussion  
 Topic: Analysis- Discussion  
 Topic: Analysis- Discussion  
 Conclusions

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Figure 4. Structure of topic based dissertations following Bunton (1998: 114).

Agreeing with these opinions we will now move onto more current research as to what the discussion section does contain so as to build upon this work.

Belanger (1982) examined ten discussion sections from the area of neuroscience and he showed that the format of discussion sections was related to the research questions stated at the beginning of the said articles. Swales (1990: 172) considered that Belanger's finding is in any case not common, as a "chunked" composite form of the Discussion seems to be a rare phenomenon. Shaw (2000) compared discussion sections in articles and research dissertations and found that in Ph.D. theses, this chapter used more explicit arguments.

Still with research articles, but this time moving closer to the field of our study, Zahra, Zohreh and Mansoor (2008) looked at the Discussion sections

of research articles in applied linguistics. Regarding the degree of move schemata they compared English articles published in linguistics journals with two other distinct corpora of linguistics papers which were: Persian articles published in Persian journals, and English articles written by Persian-speaking writers which had been rejected for publication. This study reveals substantial variations between English and Persian styles. Generally, these authors' conclusions about discourse organization in English could enlighten non-native speakers of English languages, including Persian speakers, on the community conventions of English language discourse and the way to fit in with those conventions when writing.

Also with articles, but this time with Spanish participants, as in our study, Williams (2005) studied discourse styles in the Discussion sections of English and Spanish. The analysis comprised 64 Spanish medical research articles and 64 papers published in English language journals. The methodology incorporated rhetorical moves: making claims of knowledge, comparing current and previous findings, providing background information, expressing results, making statements and the amount of initial background information. The results showed that two different discourse styles ("progressive" and "retrogressive") did exist within the Discussion section of these corpora. English native authors used the retrogressive and the Spanish writers used the progressive style. Also the findings showed that the discourse style is sometimes adjusted to the language of the Discussion section.

Similarly, we should not forget to touch upon relevant observations about the Results section. Thompson (1993) found that the Results sections in Biochemistry papers have a large amount of commentary. Swales (1990: 170) stated that "there is from the discourse analyst's viewpoint, much variation in the extent to which Results sections simply describe results and the extent to which Discussion sections re-describe results". However, we do not recommend description even if there is a variation, because we consulted the APA Manual (American Psychological Association, 2001) and it does not advocate including descriptions in the results section. For our field of empirical research this is the approved style manual and it states that in the Results section: "Discussion of the implications of the results is not appropriate here" (American Psychological Association, 2001: 20). A Results section presents, and may describe, the results but the Discussion does not re-describe them: it discusses them. According to the APA style manual only the results themselves should be presented in the Results section with very

little other text. Additionally, the Discussion section, as we have seen from the moves literature, gives useful comparison with previous research, highlights unexpected findings, explains the implications of them, describes how far the original findings can be generalised to other situations, advances the field in this way and shows the path to how the present research can lead onto future fruitful investigation.

Swales (1990: 175-176) also stated that: “The surprise is that, on preliminary evidence at least, the major differences do not lie so much in the Introductions and Discussions (where I believe most people would expect it) but rather in the Method and Results sections”. Again, we would have to disagree because of the omission of the Discussion sections in our Spanish doctoral students’ theses. The Results section was followed by the Conclusions section, thus omitting the valuable Discussion stage. Swales (2004) discusses the contentious topic of the part played by the English language in the globalisation of academic scenes and connects the rise of the English language to researchers’ efforts to publish and gain status in academia. However, Swales also accepts “glocalisation” (Swales, 2004: 11) which is the subject of certain ways of using English found in specific areas of the world. Although Swales was referring to the special usage of the English language, the present paper could argue that the omission of Discussion chapter is also a localised idiosyncrasy at the moment and may later change due to this said globalisation.

Myers (1990) is of the opinion that an analysis of moves may be helpful pedagogically but only pays attention to what is there in the text and may not take into account the need for the writer’s rhetorical strategy. In the case of the doctoral students observed, this comment is very pertinent as not everything was in the text because the students were moving straight on to the Conclusions chapter. Since no previous study seems to have focused on the Discussion chapter not existing in doctoral theses, a preliminary examination of Spanish research writers was therefore carried out as the ground-work even before the study in the present paper. This was done to see if there was any basis in our observation. The articles by 48 Spanish linguists included in the work edited by Luque Durán (2006) were scrutinised and it was found that all of them lacked a Discussion section and the closing stages included only a Conclusions section. This confirmed the initial hypothesis and so pointed to a possible rhetorical variation in different cultures’ academic writing structures. This naturally leads to the formulation of our research questions, this time about Ph.D. theses. To that end, we will

now move forward onto the research which comprises the second half of this paper.

## **The empirical study**

### **Research questions**

The first research question was if Spanish Ph.D. writers omit the discussion chapter. The second research question was if this omission happens only in the field of English Studies or if it applies to Spanish Studies too. That is to say, to Spanish Ph.D. writers when writing in English as their second language (NNS) or to Spanish Ph.D. writers when writing in their mother tongue (NS).

### **Method**

A national exploratory study was carried out to confirm or disprove the hypothesis. This was done using the only Spanish national data base (*Dialnet*) as far as we know, containing full text theses and using the key words “English Studies” (*Filología Inglesa*). Additionally, another exploration was subsequently carried out using the words “Spanish Studies” (*Filología Española*). *Dialnet*, a database hosted by the University of La Rioja, was accessed on various occasions, the latest being on June 26, 2009.

### **The two data sets**

The corpus initially comprised theses from the field of English Studies, the same field in which the present authors had first noticed omission of the Discussion chapter. Moreover, in order to compare results, the corpus was expanded to embrace theses from the field of Spanish Studies. The theses comprising the two data sets were contained in *Dialnet*. Those from the field of English Studies totalled sixteen in number with a further thirty-nine from the field of Spanish Studies. This gave a grand total of fifty-five. These were written in both Spanish and English and read in the field of English and Spanish Studies in Spanish universities over the last ten years.

### **Data collection**

The methodology for this exploratory study entailed the drawing up and use of a scale or checklist of independent variables (variables checklist). At first,

only one dependent variable had been considered for the analysis of the theses in the field of English Studies – namely the omission or inclusion of the Discussion chapter. However, as the data of theses were scrutinized, it seemed obvious that there were quite a few intervening independent variables present. Thus, the checklist was lengthened to include them. Subsequently, on scrutinizing the theses from the field of Spanish Studies, the list of variables was added to yet again. The full final list is as follows:

- 1) Number of theses *not* containing a Discussion chapter.
  - 2) Number of theses containing a Discussion chapter.
  - 3) Doctoral student author of Spanish nationality.
  - 4) Doctoral student author of a different nationality.
  - 5) Language: Written in English L2.
  - 6) Language: Written in Spanish L1.
  - 7) Supervisor: English nationality.
  - 8) Supervisor: Spanish nationality.
  - 9) \*Supervisor: German nationality.
  - 10) \*Joint Supervisors: Spanish nationality and Venezuelan nationality.
  - 11) Number of theses without an Acknowledgements section.
  - 12) Authors in contact with English-speaking Countries.
  - 13) Authors in contact with English researchers.
  - 14) English Linguistics.
  - 15) English Literature.
  - 16) Spanish Studies.
  - 17) Other Topics (empirical linguistic study, Catalan language, Spanish narrative, Argentinean Spanish, French in Spain, Spanish vegetation, sign language, medicine in Spain, Spanish literature, Latin, poetry, Chinese, language processing and on-line newspapers in Spanish).
  - 18) Other Departments.
  - 19) With Contents page at the end.
  - 20) Without a Contents page.
  - 21) Total number of theses.
- \* Used only in the corpus of English Studies theses.

### **Descriptive Statistics Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used for the analysis – namely frequency counts – and these are also given as relative values expressed by percentages. For the variable of contact with English-speaking countries or researchers (variable 12), the data was found in the acknowledgements section of the theses studied.

## Results

After scrutinizing the sixteen L2 and thirty-nine L1 full-text doctoral theses using the above mentioned checklist, the information obtained from them was organised (see Tables 1, 2, 3a and 3b) and analysed.

Variable	Frequency count for Spanish Studies	Percentage for Spanish Studies of total 39	Frequency count for English Studies	Percentage for English Studies of total 16
Number of theses <i>not</i> containing a Discussion chapter	35	90%	13	81%
Number of theses containing a Discussion chapter	4	10%	3	19%
Doctoral student author of Spanish nationality	34	87%	16	100%
Doctoral student author of a different nationality	5	13%	0	0%
Language: English (L2)	0	0%	6	37%
Language: Spanish (L1)	39	100%	10	63%
Supervisor: English nationality	0	0%	4	22%
Supervisor: Spanish nationality	39	100%	11	61%
Supervisor: German nationality	0	0%	2	11%
Joint Spanish and Venezuelan Supervisors	0	0%	1	6%
Without Acknowledgements section	12	31%	0	0%
Contact with English-speaking countries	2	5%	6	38%
Contact with English-speaking researchers	2	5%	9	56%
English Linguistics	---	---	10	62.5%
English Literature	---	---	6	37.5%
Spanish Studies	24	62%	---	---
Other topics	15	38%	---	---
Other departments	23	59%	0	0%
Contents page at end of thesis	4	10%	0	0%
Without a contents page	35	90%	0	0%
Total number of theses	39	100%	16	100%

Table 1. Main findings for doctoral theses analysed.

Obviously, taking into account that the target country studied is Spain, the most frequent pattern of doctoral thesis was that of being written in

Spanish, by a Spanish doctoral student and supervised by a Spanish academic. Table 1 also confirms the hypothesis formulated at the beginning of this work in that almost all the doctoral theses from the fields of both English Studies and Spanish Studies studied here lacked a Discussion section. In fact, thirteen out of the sixteen theses omitted it in English Studies, and thirty-five out of the thirty-nine theses from Spanish Studies (81% and 90% respectively). The possible reasons will later be given in the Discussion section of the present work. For English Studies the results of this thesis by thesis analysis can be found in Table 2, and for Spanish Studies in Tables 3a and 3b in the Appendix.

Other interesting points come to light in the analysis. As portrayed in Table 2 the general pattern varies. We can see that variables related to the supervisor's nationality, and the language in which the thesis is written, are relevant. Table 2 shows that there seems to be a correlation of frequencies between foreign supervisors and the presence of a Discussion chapter (56% of the English Studies theses). If we look at the "existence of a Discussion chapter" variable we will note the correlation with the foreign supervisor. Curiously enough, theses supervised by German university lecturers did not contain a Discussion chapter. Moreover, the presence of a Discussion chapter correlated in every case with a thesis from the field of linguistics, but never with a literature thesis. If the thesis was written in English, this appears to correlate with stays and contact with the English speaking world. Nevertheless, these stays and contacts do not seem to be enough to guarantee the inclusion of a Discussion chapter. Again we can point to the correlation between the Discussion chapter and foreign supervisors.

Tables 3a and 3b show the findings analysed thesis by thesis from the field of Spanish Studies. These totalled 39 theses in all and again the great majority had no Discussion chapter (90%). Thus, again we can confirm our hypothesis. Interestingly a few (5 theses, or 13%) had included chapters coming after the Results chapter and had named them varyingly as "General Valuation", "Synthesis", etc. Overall, this second corpus also followed the general pattern, that is to say, Spanish author, Spanish supervisor and written in Spanish. Points worthy of note include the fact that whereas English Studies had no thesis authors from other countries, Spanish Studies did. No thesis from Spanish Studies was written in English for obvious reasons. All were written in Spanish. Two theses acknowledged contact with English-speaking countries and researchers. The analysis of the data revealed a much wider range of topics for the theses from this corpus than for English

Studies. Twenty-three theses were not enrolled in Spanish departments. The most curious data here is that twelve out of the 39 theses (31%) lacked the acknowledgements section, and that we had to look at the back of four theses in order to find out what they contained, that is to say, the contents page (see Tables 3a and 3 b in the Appendix).

## Discussion

The results above confirmed the hypothesis in that the great majority of the doctoral thesis scrutinized in Spain lacked a Discussion chapter in both Spanish L1 and L2 theses. In fact, overall forty-eight out of fifty-five theses scrutinized had no Discussion chapter. Interestingly, a number of additional intervening variables were also found to be important. In the English Studies corpus the thesis analysis disclosed the correlation between foreign supervisors and the existence of a discussion chapter. Foreign supervisors do not seem to follow the Spanish tradition of ending with the Conclusions chapter directly after the results. The omission of the Discussion chapter, as well as being due to this outside influence shown by the association found here, could also be down to the fact that the writers may not have genre knowledge. They may not know Western (or American) conventions of the academic and scientific community (regarding the format of a Research Article). Unfortunately, we do not know if these doctoral students were trained or received any explicit training in their doctoral programme, as lack of genre knowledge may be a factor accounting for the differences we have found.

Curiously enough, the supervisors of German nationality did not seem to correlate with the existence of a discussion chapter. This could be an interesting point to look into further and could merit a future step for the present research. It could take the shape of a replica of the present study but with a German data base. There was no such correlation in the sample from Spanish Studies as all the supervisors were Spanish. Instead, other interesting observations were found. Some theses from this sample encompassed chapters after the results that could be considered Discussion chapters. The authors had titled such chapters *Reflexiones Finales* (“Final Reflections”) and so on.

Our research shows more complex findings than those outlined by Connor, Nagelhout and William (2008) –i.e., differences in writing are due to culture.

Our findings are not merely due to different cultures but more complex and detailed reasons. In fact all of our corpora were taken from the same culture. Our work is not contrastive but descriptive and within the one culture.

## Theses from the field of English Studies

Theses written in English seem to be related to authors' stays in, and contact with, the English speaking world. Notwithstanding, this does not seem to guarantee the insertion of a Discussion chapter, while having a foreign supervisor does. It is probable that the decision to write the thesis in English was not also related to the inclusion of a Discussion chapter. However, knowledge of how to do research, write it up and years of reading research on the part of a supervisor who has not been influenced by the Spanish rhetoric is probably powerful. Interestingly, the presence of a discussion chapter correlated in every case with a thesis in the field of linguistics, but never in literature. We may speculate that one of the reasons could be due to the tradition in the field of using European and American style manuals in linguistics. For example, the aforementioned APA manual (American Psychological Association, 2001), widely used in applied linguistics, includes instructions on how to write discussion chapters, whereas this section is not traditional in style manuals used in literature. For instance, the *MHRA Style Guide* (Modern Humanities Research Association, 2008) mentions citation rules mostly and simply refers to the parts of a work where the discussion chapter would be found as "text" in general but not to any individual parts of a piece of work.

The findings here possibly point to continuing change and integration of writing styles in theses in Spain, a country within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The contribution of this research to the question of the development of academic discourses in the new international framework, is that of tracking the evolution of the possible proliferation and regular inclusion of the Discussion chapter in English Studies theses, as Spain becomes more and more integrated into the EHEA. As we have seen here, an additional influence could be that of the university supervisors in question and we may speculate on the influence of the future migration of university supervisors throughout Europe and Spain, one of the aspects promoted by the Bologna agreement. It is surmised that other fields in Spain, such as Spanish Studies, will be slower to do the same in their field-

related theses and will keep to the traditional Spanish format of Results to Conclusions jump even within the EHEA convergence. This is due obviously to the wealth of home-grown supervisors for the field of Spanish studies. In the next section we consider this supposition.

## **Theses from the field of Spanish Studies**

In Spanish Studies theses less variation was found in the format according to the checklist of variables. On the other hand, some new interesting characteristics were identified.

Only four of the thirty-nine theses contained a Discussion chapter, which means that twenty-nine of these theses did not include a Discussion. However, there were five other theses with a section resembling the Discussion chapter and these were varyingly called: “Recapitulation” (two theses), “Synthesis”, “Data Comparison” or “Final Reflections”. This could indicate that some Spanish doctoral students are feeling the need to deliberate the meaning of their results, but may not be confident or did not know genre conventions. In the corpus from Spanish Studies there was no such clear relationship between the presence of a Discussion and a thesis from a certain field. However, two of the discussion chapter theses from Spanish Studies were enrolled in a psychology department and one within a department of medicine. Again this could indicate the use of style manuals as well as influence of the scientific tradition where Discussion chapters are more common.

Thirty-four of the authors were Spanish writing in their mother tongue, and therefore five were foreign speakers writing in Spanish. We have highlighted the fact that in the other corpus from English Studies, 100% were Spanish and there were no thesis authors from other countries. All the supervisors in this corpus were Spanish and all theses were written in Spanish. In this corpus, two thesis authors mentioned having had contact with English-speaking countries and English researchers. However, some theses did not have an Acknowledgements section. This meant that in reality it was not possible to obtain complete information about absence or presence of contact with English-speaking countries in twelve cases. As to the topics covered, these were varied in nature. Twenty-four theses were on topics related to Spanish Studies and the other fifteen were on other facets from different departments but related to Spanish culture. Only twenty-three

theses were enrolled in Spanish Studies departments, and although related to this area, the others came from a variety of departments such as Computer Studies, Pharmacy, Geography, Communication and Psychology. This may indicate that this database *Dialnet* and resulting corpus of Spanish Studies obviously encompass areas that only touch on Spain because they are more related to Spanish culture and are not just limited to language and literature. On the other hand it may just indicate preferences of the doctoral students from Spanish Studies. Curiously, four theses had their contents page placed at the end of the work. This probably indicates a still active strong national influence on writing in Spain. All theses containing a contents page at the end were from Spanish Studies departments. There was no indication of style manuals used, if any. Some of the thesis formats were very idiosyncratic; some had a contents page at the beginning of each chapter.

The analysis of more disciplines still will be the focus of a future study by the present authors. Further research will also include the compilation of a corpus of empirical Ph.D. theses written in a range of disciplines and countries. There is also a need for more full text theses to be available to researchers so as to be able to carry on the investigation started here.

Additionally, missing out the Discussion section nearly always means missing out the corresponding data description and moves. Therefore, this probably shows that our students are omitting a vast amount of useful data, above all, what their research means and the significance of it. As we have seen, and according to Huckin (1987), Discussion sections begin with a description of the findings before positioning these findings within the established literature. Next they assess the general importance of the findings. Thus, it is almost never enough just to have a Results section with its figures presented without any subsequent in-depth explanation of them. If a Discussion section were included it would signify that the importance of the said research could be clearly ascertained at first glance. This would mean an increase in status for our Spanish students' research, as it would be paid more attention throughout Europe.

## Conclusions

To conclude, first it was observed informally that in the field of English Studies in Spain much academic writing in native Spanish also omits the Discussion section. Therefore, we made a follow-up systematic analysis of

full text theses in a Spanish data base and used two corpora from English and Spanish Studies respectively. Due to the theses here described, we surmise that it seems that Spanish thesis writers writing in their mother tongue or foreign language omit the discussion, write the results section and the conclusion. This could point to intercultural variation in the structural preferences of different writing cultures. It would be interesting to look into this field and also at different stages as Spain is integrated into the EHEA. The inclusion of the Discussion section could be useful for other students already identified by other researchers as well as for our students if they are planning to have their work considered or published internationally. Additionally, it could be useful to look into the same variables in thesis writing in languages other than Spanish and English. The aim of this would be to see if the Discussion section is also absent there and particularly when writing internationally and also when writing about research that is empirically-based.

In summary, we must bear in mind that the conception of the EHEA is still fairly recent, maybe five years old in Spain, whereas our corpora date back ten years. Positively, this gives us a good amount of time to set up future studies in this area and even expand the variables to be looked at. Perhaps style manuals and Discussion chapters will become more common when writing Spanish theses, above all with the convergence already taking place in Europe.

The fact that even the theses from the Spanish Studies departments written by authors of non-Spanish nationality lacked a Discussion chapter and followed a very traditional Spanish style of writing may indicate how cautious Spanish supervisors were and their efforts to help ensure success in the doctoral theses of these foreign doctoral students in Spain. On the other hand however, a need for a Discussion chapter or similar may be discerned in Spain due to the existence of our five theses where chapters or sections resembling the Discussion were encountered.

It is hoped the information in the present paper will be useful for those students wishing to publish their work in Europe or internationally as well as converge with the written output style of other countries. The fact that this analysis covers thesis writing, which is the baseline point before the publishing of their research articles, means that students may now be made more aware when wishing to include Discussion chapters for publishing. This inclusion will do justice to their findings by explaining them more

deeply. Maybe, it highlights the need for a larger quantity of explicit teaching of the thesis genre and academic conventions in general to doctoral students.

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# Appendix

Variable	Thesis no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
No Discussion chapter			X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Contains Discussion		X		X				X									
Author Spanish		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
In English		X		X			X					X			X	X	X
In Spanish			X		X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X			
Supervisor: Spanish			X			X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Supervisor: English		X		X	X		X										
Supervisor: German									X			X					
Joint Spanish and Venezuelan Supervisors								X									
Contact with English Speaking Countries		X		X								X		X	X		X
Contact with other English Speaking Researchers		X	X	X				X				X	X	X	X		X
English Linguistics		X		X	X			X		X	X		X	X		X	X
English Literature			X			X	X		X			X			X		

Table 2: Findings analysed individually in each thesis: from the field of English Studies (16 theses)

Thesis no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1	X	X		X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
2			X		X					X	X									X
3+4	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5																				
6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7																				
8	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
9+10																				
11	X			X	X		X		X	X	X							X		
12																X				
13			¿?												X					
14+15																				
16	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
17			X			X							X						X	
18			X					X		X	X	X	X						X	X
19		X													X					
20											X									

Table 3a. Findings analysed individually in each of the 39 theses for the field of Spanish Studies.

Thesis no.	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
Variable	(11)																		
1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X*	X		X	X	X	X
2						X	X												
3+4	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(13)	X	Cameroon	"Final Reflections" Argentinean	X	Chinese	X	X
5																			
6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7																			
8	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
9+10																			
11								X				X	X						
12																			
13													X						
14+15																			
16		X	X				X				X	X		X		X	X		X
17	(14)			(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)					Language Processing		On-line newspapers in Spanish	Chinese	Poetry		
18	(20)	(21)	X	(22)	(23)	(24)	(25)	X	(26)	X	X								
19								X											
20																			

Table 3b. Findings analysed individually in each of the 39 theses for the field of Spanish Studies.