Seeking research funding in a peripheral context: a learner corpus genre study of grant proposal summaries

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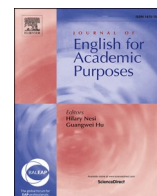
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Seeking research funding in a peripheral context: A learner corpus genre study of grant proposal summaries

Maggie Charles [a,*], Karin Whiteside [b]

[a] *University of Oxford, Oxford, UK*
[b] *International Study and Language Institute, University of Reading, 224 Edith Morley Building, Shinfield Rd, Whiteknights, Reading, RG6 6EL, UK*

ABSTRACT

Although the grant proposal is a high-stakes genre for researchers, there are few analyses available for consultation by learners and most studies investigate only a limited number of successful proposals written by experienced academics. This study reports on a genre analysis of a learner corpus of grant proposal summaries (abstracts), written by researchers who operate at the periphery of academia. The proposals were written by exiled Syrian academics and submitted to the Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara) grant awarding body for research funding. A corpus of 102 proposal summaries was compiled consisting of 27 successful and 75 unsuccessful summaries, and a genre framework of three moves and ten steps was developed. Successful summaries were contrasted with unsuccessful summaries; this comparison reveals that unsuccessful summaries underuse the move *Indicating the value of the research*. Specifically, they tend to omit two steps: *Importance* (of the research) and *Research Outcomes*. All Cara summaries were also compared with Matzler's (2021) prototype; results show that both successful and unsuccessful summaries underuse the *Methods* step. These findings provide pointers to the genre functions likely to be most problematic for learners, and have immediate practical applications in pedagogic materials for proposal writing.

1. Introduction

The imperative to publish research in international English-language-medium journals, and the disproportionate pressure this imposes on scholars working in 'periphery' settings, in contrast to their better resourced 'centre' peers (Wallerstein, 1991), has been widely documented (e.g. Belcher, 2007; Canagarajah, 1996; Lillis & Curry, 2010). Studies of periphery scholars' publication endeavours have shown that in addition to scientific, linguistic and rhetorical competence a range of 'non-discursive' (Canagarajah, 1996) factors influence relative success. For example, Curry and Lillis (2010) find that the nature and quality of the academic research networks developed by multilingual scholars in central and southern Europe impacted the efficacy of their transnational engagement with English-medium publishing. Tardy (2003) also stresses the key importance of academic networks, specifically for facilitating proposal-writing, while Khuder and Petrić (2023) detail how for 12 Syrian academics the experience of exile has contributed to marginalisation in terms of relevant employment, research activity and writing for international publication.

In a list of resources that are 'essential' for successful international publication, the mobilisation of which are enabled by effective participation in research networks, Curry and Lillis include the resource of 'receiving rhetorical/linguistic support' (2010, p. 282). This

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area is one to which applied linguistic research can usefully contribute expertise, and of particular relevance is English for Specific Purposes (ESP) genre research involving analysis of rhetorical moves. Moves may be defined as segments of text which perform a specific rhetorical function and may be made up of smaller functional units called steps (Swales, 1990). A purpose central to the development of ESP move analysis has been pedagogic support for writing research genres (Swales, 1990), and over the past three decades a very large number of move analysis studies of the different constitutive parts of the research article (RA) genre have been undertaken (for an overview, see Cheng, 2019). Knowledge from this type of research has informed pedagogic interventions, in both published materials (e.g. Robinson et al., 2008; Swales & Feak, 2012) and specific contexts (e.g. Dong & Lu, 2020; Li et al., 2020). However, to date, research into the rhetorical structure of the research grant proposal genre has been extremely limited, which has in turn limited the knowledge-base that can be drawn on for teaching this key genre (Flowerdew, 2016).

The research grant proposal is among the most high-stakes academic genres due to the fact that successfully securing grants enables researchers to undertake and then potentially publish their work, thereby facilitating career advancement opportunities (Connor & Mauranen, 1999; Myers, 1990; Swales, 1990). It possesses features that are unique in terms of purpose and audience. Feng and Shi (2004) observe that it entails higher levels of marketisation than other academic genres, and addresses two distinct audiences, peer reviewers with specialised knowledge of the target research field, alongside grant review committee members often possessing much less discipline-specific knowledge. Matzler (2021) points out that in contrast to the specialised global readership of RAs, the audience for grant proposals tends to be localised, linked to the specific funding stream. The genre's high-stakes-ness sharply contrasts with its lack of public visibility, often for reasons of confidentiality (Matzler, 2021), making it an 'occluded genre' (Swales, 1996, p. 47). Taken together, its unique features and the lack of available examples make it particularly challenging for inexperienced research writers to craft effectively.

The occluded nature of research grant proposals has also contributed to the fact that they have been under-researched. Early ethnographic studies of the genre, by Myers (1990) who examined the writing and revision practices of two biologists and by Van Nostrand (1994) who studied the grant-writing process in the context of US government-sponsored military research, did not involve textual analysis. Securing access to authentic examples of proposal texts is challenging for genre researchers, and samples have tended to be relatively small.

The first notable textual analysis was conducted by Connor and Mauranen (1999), who examined 34 European Union grant proposals to develop an initial ten-move scheme for the genre, which Connor (2000) then tested and refined in a new context. Connor and Mauranen's model delineated ten moves: 1. *Territory*, 2. *Gap*, 3. *Goal*, 4. *Means*, 5. *Reporting Previous Research*, 6. *Achievements*, 7. *Benefits*, 8. *Competence Claim*, 9. *Importance Claim*, and 10. *Compliance Claim*. Applying this framework in the US context, Connor analysed 14 research grant proposals authored by two researchers in the humanities and three in natural sciences and found that the framework was generally applicable. Additionally, she reported that some moves (*Territory*, *Gap*, *Goal* and *Means*) occurred consistently whilst others (*Benefits*, *Importance Claim*, and *Competence Claim*) were not obligatory. Later studies have drawn heavily upon Connor and Mauranen's framework both in the context of academic (e.g. Cotos, 2019; Feng & Shi, 2004; Flowerdew, 2016; Koutsantoni, 2009) and non-academic grant proposals (Connor & Upton, 2004).

Part-genres of the research grant proposal have received less research attention than the full proposal text, although Cotos (2019) provides a genre analysis of the section on Broader Impacts in US National Science Foundation (NSF) proposals. Four studies have thus far carried out detailed textual analyses using move models to describe the abstract or summary (Feng, 2006; Feng & Shi, 2004; Matzler, 2021; Tardy, 2011), while Flowerdew (2016) synthesised a seven-move structure from the literature. The abstract/summary is of key importance to the proposal, since it offers the writer the opportunity to gain the attention of the readers and showcase the potential contributions of their research; in Swales' terms, it is 'the first real rhetorical test' (1990, p. 187). Feng and Shi analysed the one-page summaries of nine successful proposals for Social Science & Humanities Council of Canada grants from the discipline of education. They were authored by L1 English writers, seven of whom were established scholars, and two 'new scholars', who had

Table 1
Move/Step analyses of Feng and Shi (2004), Feng (2006), Tardy (2011) and Matzler (2021).

Feng and Shi (2004) (n = 9)	Feng (2006) (n = 37)	Tardy (2011) (n = 40)	Matzler (2021) (n = 36)
Move 1 Justifying a Research Need	Move 1 Establishing a Territory	Move 1 Announcing Project	Move 1 Territory
Step 1 Territory	Step 1 Centrality Claim	Move 2 Describing Context	Move 2 Niche
Step 2 Niche Step 3 Reporting own Previous Research	Step 2 Topic Generalization Step 3 Reporting own Previous Research	Move 3 Describing Objectives	Move 3 Goal
Move 2 Describing the Means to meet the Need Step 1 Objectives Step 2 Methods	Move 2 Establishing a Niche Step 1A Counter-claim Step 1B Indicating a Gap Step 1C Question-raising	Move 4 Describing Methods	Move 4 Means
	Move 3 Outlining Research Objectives	Move 5 Identifying Outcomes of Projects	Move 5 Benefits
Move 3 Claiming Potential Contributions	Move 4 Describing Research Means	Move 6 Identifying Impacts of Projects	
Step 1 Importance	Move 5 Explanation and Justification		
Step 2 Achievements Step 3 Benefits	Move 6 Claiming potential Contributions		

completed their doctorates within the past five years. Feng (2006) adapted this earlier analysis to 37 successful abstracts (average length 247.25 words) produced for a Hong Kong funding body while Tardy's data consisted of 40 successful abstracts in linguistics and mathematics from the NSF website with an average length of 338 words. Matzler also drew on publicly available successful proposal abstracts, analysing 36 texts, with a median length of approximately 200 words, authored by 'emerging researchers', i.e. up to seven years post-PhD. Researchers had L1 or L2 English and worked in science/engineering across two higher education contexts, New Zealand and Chile. To develop the framework for his analysis, Matzler simplified Flowerdew's seven-move pedagogic model to five constituent moves. The analyses of Feng and Shi, Feng, Tardy, and Matzler are presented in Table 1.

As might be expected, the four analyses reveal certain commonalities, despite the different terms used. All four cover the five moves identified by Matzler (2021), suggesting that these are characteristic of the genre, but Tardy (2011) assigns move status to *Announcing the Project*, separating it from objectives or goals. Feng and Shi's (2004) and Feng's (2006) frameworks differ more markedly from the other two, since they employ a move/step structure and add steps not included by the others: *Reporting own Previous Research* (both studies), *Importance* of the research (Feng & Shi) and *Explanation and Justification* (Feng). All four frameworks also examine the sequence in which moves occur, but with little agreement in their findings. Feng and Shi observed that their proposal summaries were relatively sequential in terms of moves, using a *Need→Means→Contributions* structure. All but two summaries included all three moves, and there was an almost even split in whether the authors fronted their summaries with Move 1 (*Need*) or Move 2 (*Means*). Feng found the most frequent move sequence to be *Territory→Niche→Objectives,* similar to the first two moves in Feng and Shi, but omitting *Contributions*. By contrast, Tardy found more variability in move sequencing, likely due to disciplinary factors, with most linguistics abstracts using *Context→Methods→Outcome/Impact,* while mathematics texts tended to begin with the *Methods* move. She identified *Context* and *Outcomes/Impact* as obligatory moves. Matzler found the majority of abstracts in his study to be 'near-prototypical' showing only one variation in the use or sequence of the moves he presented. However, he noted the *Goal* move's distinctive facility to change position, often occurring initially, and the use of *Means* to close the text.

Whilst this work has considerably advanced our understanding of the rhetorical structure of the grant proposal abstract, research knowledge of this part-genre is still rather limited. All four studies involved relatively small data-sets, ranging from nine (Feng & Shi, 2004) to 40 (Tardy, 2011), and they only analysed data from successful grant proposals. The data-set for the current study comprises 102 research grant proposal summaries, and includes examples of both successful/funded and unsuccessful/unfunded projects. Moreover, the authors of our texts are a cohort which has received little research attention, displaced academics, the majority of whom are not in secure full-time university employment. Compared to the successful researchers working in centre locations studied by Feng and Shi (Canada) and Tardy (US), Feng's (2006) researchers in Hong Kong and those of Matzler (2021) in Chile can perhaps be seen as working in non-centre or 'semiperipheral' contexts (Bennett, 2014). However, the scholars in our study are attempting to further their research careers from a much more peripheral and precarious context, as explained below.

The overall purpose of this study is pedagogical, to provide evidence to underpin materials development for proposal writing, including the proposal abstract/summary. We employ two approaches to this problem. First we compare proposal summaries from successful and unsuccessful projects to see whether there are specific characteristics of successful summaries that can be useful in designing teaching materials. In so doing, we make use of the judgements of assessors, and while we accept that many factors, not only linguistic, contribute to the acceptance or rejection of a proposal, we would argue that it is important for writers to be able to make the most of their research ideas in terms of how they present them rhetorically. Accordingly, the first research question is as follows.

RQ1: *What, if any, are the differences in generic move and step use between Cara funded and unfunded summaries?*

Our second approach is to apply Matzler's (2021) framework to the Cara summaries and to compare Cara data with those of Matzler. Matzler's study was selected as a comparator for several reasons. First, Matzler's 'emerging' researchers have some similarity to the Cara writers in their academic position and level of experience. Second, in discipline terms, 45% of Cara projects are science/engineering based, while another 6% are inter-disciplinary, drawing on both natural and social science expertise; thus around half of Cara summaries are likely to align well with the science/engineering data examined by Matzler. Of greater importance, however, is that Matzler's framework clearly identifies and highlights the main functions of the proposal abstract, as evidenced by the fact that its five moves are all present in the other three genre analyses, which cover a variety of disciplines (Feng, 2006; Feng & Shi, 2004; Tardy, 2011). Thus Matzler's framework offers a generalised account of the key constituents of the proposal summary, which is likely to be applicable not just in science/engineering, but in other disciplinary contexts, too. With our pedagogical aim in mind, the purpose here is to ascertain the extent to which Cara summaries would be likely to meet the expectations of a wide readership. Applying Matzler's prototype to Cara data, and using his findings as indicative of how the prototype may be realised is therefore likely to reveal the extent to which Cara summaries are likely to align with the expectations of a range of readers. Thus the second research question is.

RQ2: *What, if any, are the differences between Matzler's (2021) proposal abstracts and Cara funded and unfunded summaries in terms of their generic prototypicality?*

Taken together the answers to these two questions allow us to gain insights into the ways in which these summaries written by researchers in peripheral contexts may fall short of the standards required to gain funding. This evidence will then enable the construction of appropriate pedagogical materials and should be of relevance to other instructors who teach proposal writing.

2. Context of the research

2.1. The Cara Syria programme

This research was carried out under the auspices of the Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara) Syria Programme. Cara is a charitable organisation set up by UK scholars and scientists in 1933 to provide help to academics suffering persecution under Nazism and Fascism across Europe. Its overarching purpose was 'the relief of suffering and the defence of learning and science' (https://www.cara.ngo/ who-we-are), an objective which is still highly relevant today. The Cara Syria Programme was initiated in 2016, in order to '*strengthen and connect Syrian academics by facilitating continued academic development and engagement, and contributing new opportunities to ensure that this major part of Syria's intellectual and cultural capital plays its vital role in the future of Syria and its higher education.*' (https://cara-syria.org/). These aims emphasise the need to support the continuation and expansion of research by Syrian academics and thus underscore the key importance of the proposal genre, which is crucial in obtaining the necessary funding to pursue this research.

The Cara Syria Programme consists of five strands, two of which are relevant to this paper: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and the Cara Fellowship Scheme. The EAP strand includes weekly online one-to-one teaching of Syrian participants, along with the provision of online and face-to-face workshops on topics that are important for the development of research writing/speaking skills. Teachers are volunteers who are qualified and experienced in EAP or a relevant field and are current or former instructors in higher education institutions in the UK and elsewhere.

The Cara Fellowship Scheme supports Syrian participants' ongoing academic engagement through the provision of grants for research funding of up to £7000 which are applied for on a competitive basis. The aim is to ensure rigorous quality research outputs including publication in peer-reviewed journals and international conference presentations. Funding proposals are elicited through periodic calls for submissions and require a detailed proposal of around 2000–3000 words, other documents e.g. a budget and the curriculum vitae of each applicant, along with a summary of up to 500 words. However, summaries do not always adhere to the word count, with around 20% of both funded and unfunded summaries exceeding it. Funded summaries ranged in length from 157 to 819 words (Average: 420; Median: 400), while unfunded summaries recorded counts of 97–826 words (Average: 395; Median: 406).

Detailed guidance notes, including the selection criteria, are provided for completing the application, but these do not include specific advice on writing the summary. All proposals are peer-reviewed by experts in the field and final decisions on acceptance/ rejection are taken by a committee of experienced academics. Seven selection criteria are applied: 1. Likely impact including capacity-building; 2. Quality; 3. Innovation/originality; 4. Feasibility; 5. Team relevance/competence; 6. Value for money; 7. Dissemination strategy. These criteria are in line with those of the NSF given in Tardy's (2011) study; the three other studies on proposal summaries (Feng, 2006; Feng & Shi, 2004; Matzler, 2021) do not provide details of selection criteria.

2.2. Participants

The proposal writers in this study were all on the Cara Syria Programme, which they joined after fleeing Syria in the wake of the conflict which broke out in 2011. All had been members of universities in Syria, with academic qualifications and positions ranging from young scholars still completing their PhDs to former professors at a senior level. Most participants were based in the relative safety of Turkey, but found themselves in a precarious position, uncertain as to their future in exile and often having to support themselves and their families through non-academic jobs or insecure posts outside their area of expertise. They faced, therefore, multiple resource deficits, including lack of time to devote to study or research and most importantly, lack of a university affiliation to support their academic work. This included not only a dearth of financial backing, but also lack of access to physical/digital infra-structure including laboratories and libraries, and the absence of disciplinary contacts and networks. Clearly, as noted by Canagarajah (1996), this lack of resources is highly likely to impact academic work both in quantity as well as quality. A further point to note is that the pre-conflict Syrian higher education system was geared towards teaching rather than research. This meant that many of the participants, even those at professorial level, had little or no experience of carrying out research activities. Participants' L1 was predominantly Arabic and their English CEFR level varied from roughly B1 to C1. They worked in a wide range of disciplines, over 20 in number, including agriculture, engineering, economics/business, sociology, education and archaeology. When the proposal sum-maries were written, instruction in proposal writing and exemplars of proposals were not generally available to participants, although most writers were likely to have experienced genre-based instruction on writing research articles.

3. Method and data

3.1. The proposal summary corpus

The data for this paper consist of the summaries submitted in response to the five calls for research proposals that were issued by Cara between September 2018 and April 2022. A total of 102 submissions were available; 27 were funded and 75 unfunded, an acceptance rate of 27%, which is roughly in line with rates from major research councils in the UK. For example, the Arts and Hu-manities Research Council and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council both record acceptance rates of 26% according to UK Research and Innovation (https://www.ukri.org). Proposal submissions were anonymised; the summaries were extracted and saved as plain text files using AntFileConverter (Anthony, 2022). This procedure resulted in a corpus of 40,936 words, which was divided into two sub-corpora, one of summaries from funded proposals (11,355 words) and one of summaries from unfunded proposals

(29,581 words). Corpus investigations were performed using AntConc (Anthony, 2020).

3.2. Genre analysis procedure

The pilot phase of the genre analysis was performed by a team of four language specialists, consisting of three EAP tutors and a Syria Programme participant, who acted as a specialist informant on language and cross-cultural issues. In order to gauge the range of language competence of the participants, we used all the summaries from a single call for proposals for our pilot analysis, the 32 texts from December 2020. In line with the procedure described in Cotos (2019), a top-down genre analysis was conducted; we began by dividing the texts into individual segments that realised a functional goal following the genre structure suggested by Feng and Shi (2004). We considered their analysis to be the most appropriate starting point for our work since it offers an adequate level of detail to make it potentially useful for pedagogical purposes. In particular, Feng and Shi use both moves and steps, which we considered would be helpful for learners. However, as the analysis progressed, Feng and Shi's framework was adapted to better reflect our data and several modifications were implemented, specifically in the naming of steps, the widening of the description of Step 2 and the addition of Steps 9 and 10 (see Table 2).

At the first stage of the analysis the first author analysed all 32 summaries in order to gain an overview of the data, while the other three members of the team independently analysed a set of six summaries. The first author compared analyses, highlighting instances that differed, which were then reviewed by the team and discrepancies were resolved through a process of discussion based on close attention to the text and using the input of the Syrian Arabic-speaking analyst. Modifications to the move/step descriptions were made, resulting in the establishment of descriptions and protocols for the remaining analyses. At the second stage, the three other team members independently analysed different sets of eight or nine of the remaining pilot abstracts. These were compared with the first author's analysis and team discussions again took place in order to settle disagreements and to further refine the protocols to be applied in the final round of analyses. The two authors of this paper then took forward the analysis, applying it to the remaining 70 summaries. Regular meetings were held in order to resolve any discrepancies in analysis and once agreement was reached, the corpus was tagged with moves and steps to make retrieval of individual genre elements easier. Due to the large number of different disciplines represented

Table 2
Move/Step analysis used in this study.

Move 1 Justifying a research need		
Step	Description	Example
Step 1 Territory	Establishes a real-world and/or research context, gives background of the research	Since the Syrian uprising in 2011, approximately three million Syrians have been left homeless.
Step 2 Previous Research	Refers to previous research by the writer or others	there are abundant studies of coping strategies for economic and financial crises (Lokshin & Yemtsov, 2004; Dercon, 2004)
Step 3 Niche	Creates a space for the proposed research by indicating a real-world problem to be solved, a gap in research to be filled or a potential area for further research	However, there are no standards to identify the safe distance between drinking water wells, and the source of pollutants.

Move 2 Describing how to meet the research need		
Step	Description	Example
Step 4 Proposed Research	Presents the proposed research, describes the project, gives research objectives, puts forward research questions	The research aims to study the reasons of the weakness of response of local community in archaeological sites protection.
Step 5 Methods	Describes theoretical framework, research methods, materials, data	The quantitative data will be pooled in specific secured database and analysed using Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software (SPSS) programs and thematic analysis.

Move 3 Indicating the value of the research		
Step	Description	Example
Step 6 Importance	Indicates the importance of the proposed research	It is important to know the position of the various groups of youth towards political scene.
Step 7 Research Outcomes	Describes future research outcomes and outputs. Includes plans for their dissemination	The proposed project will obtain and publish the first assessment of climate change environmental, economic and social impact in NWS. (North-west Syria)
Step 8 Real-world Benefits	Describes future real-world benefits and how practical applications will be shared and implemented	… we will provide online training or via recorded videos to communities inside Syria to educate people on the importance and effectiveness of using the solar energy system to meet their energy needs …
Step 9 Team Competence	Establishes that the team is well-qualified to conduct the research	Our team combines key knowledge and capacities for advanced research for chickpea crop improvement in Syria in Harran University, Sanliurfa, in Turkey.
Step 10 Cara Alignment	Shows how the research will fulfil Cara aims	Our proposed project is well aligned with the Cara Syria programme objectives, enabling the Syrian team members to exercise and develop their own expertise, while working collaboratively with UK members to produce outputs of international quality and impact.

in the corpus (over 20), it was not feasible to have disciplinary specialists verify our analyses. Instead, we asked a longstanding member of the Cara grant award committee to examine our framework and he was able to confirm that our move/step analysis was suitable for application to the Cara data. Our final analytical framework appears in Table 2 with descriptions and examples of the steps. It should be noted that steps were numbered in a single sequence in order to facilitate their future use in the analysis of the detailed proposal.

The moves identified above can be related to the Cara selection criteria as follows: Move 1 covers Impact, Quality and Innovation/ originality; Move 2 relates to Quality, Innovation/originality and Feasibility, while Move 3 pertains to Impact, Value for money, Dissemination strategy and Team relevance/competence.

4. Results and discussion

This section is organised by research question and includes a discussion of each result in turn.

4.1. RQ1: What, if any, are the differences in generic move and step use between Cara funded and unfunded summaries?

In order to prepare materials to teach proposal summary writing, it was considered important to ascertain whether there were generic features that were characteristic of successful summaries so that these could be highlighted for pedagogical purposes. The differences in move use between funded and unfunded proposal summaries are presented in Fig. 1, which shows the percentages of each type of summary that contain each move. Presence of a move is recorded when the summary contains at least one instance of one step from that move. It can be seen that Move 1 *Justifying a Research Need* is slightly more frequent in unfunded than funded summaries at 96% versus 88.9% while the frequency of Move 2 *Describing how to meet the Research Need* is comparable in the two sets at 100% for funded and 98.7% for unfunded summaries. Move 3 *Indicating the Value of the Research* is present in 85.2% of funded summaries, compared to just 72% of unfunded summaries, a difference of 13.2%. The inclusion of Move 3 may be one factor underlying the slightly higher word counts for funded summaries (average number of words: funded 420; unfunded 395. It is also worth noting that the greater prevalence of Move 3 in funded summaries may indicate greater attention given to the relevant selection criteria, especially to the criterion of Impact. However, it is important to note that Move 3 is relatively underused in both sets of summaries. The lack of a clear statement of the value of the research reflected in the low figures for Move 3 could be a factor contributing to the rejection of proposals, since without Move 3, it is difficult to highlight the potential achievements and benefits of the research. One reason for the relative underuse of this move may be that these writers are more familiar with the functions needed to carry out Moves 1 and 2 from their reading of research articles. Given the occluded nature of proposal summaries, they are much less likely to have encountered examples of the functions performed by Move 3 and their lack of contact with academic networks is likely to compound this problem.

Feng and Shi (2004) found that most of their researchers used the moves in sequence, although they noted an important variant using Move 2 initially, which allows the aims and methods to be prioritised (Swales, 1990). Most Cara summaries also begin with Move 1 (funded: 77.8%; unfunded 82.7%), and a similar use of initial Move 2 is found, primarily in funded summaries (funded: 22.2%; unfunded 16%). The use of Move 3 to begin the summary only occurred in one unfunded summary and thus appears an anomalous choice. The preferred placing of this move is in final position, with funded summaries recording more occurrences of this use (funded: 74.1%; unfunded: 57.3%), reflecting its higher frequency, as seen in Fig. 1. There is also considerable use of Move 2 in final position, particularly by unfunded summaries, at 37.3% as against 25.9% for funded summaries, probably a result of the lower occurrence of Move 3 in unfunded summaries. Move 1 is not used in final position in funded summaries, but occurs four times in unfunded summaries, an indication of a less satisfactory closing message in these summaries.

Further details of the differences between funded and unfunded summaries are shown in the analysis of individual step use given in Fig. 2. Move 1 Step 1 (*Territory*) occurs with similar frequency in both sets of summaries, at 88.9% (funded) and 90.7% (unfunded) and figures for Step 3 (*Niche*) are also very close at 81.5% (funded) and 82.7% (unfunded). However, funded summaries include slightly more instances of Step 2 (*Previous Research*) at 29.6% versus 26.7%, although both sets of summaries show low numbers of occurrences. This lack of reference to the research literature may partially be explained by the writers' lack of experience, but it may well
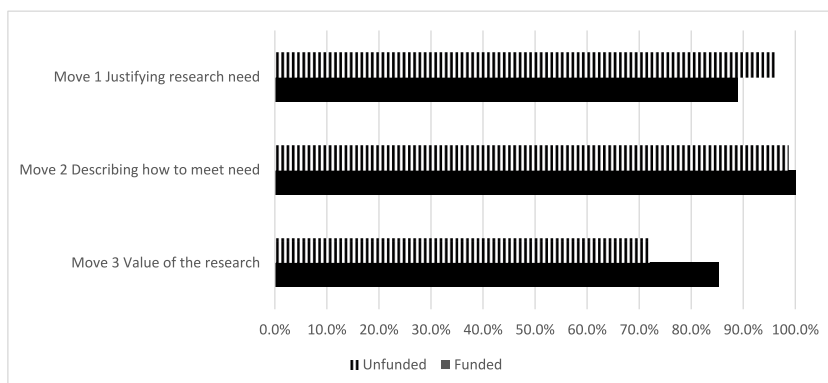

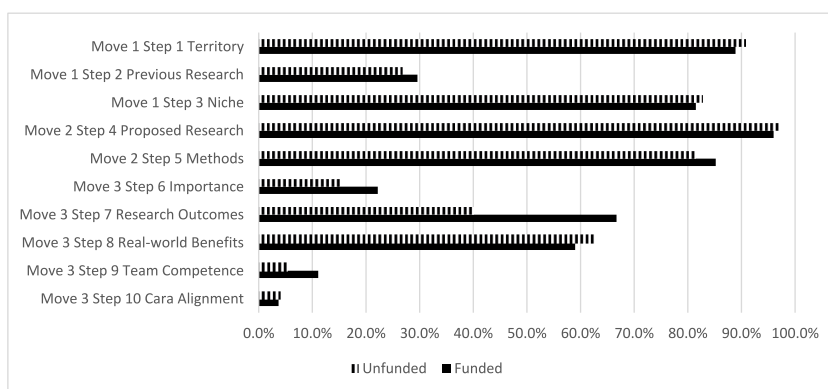**Fig. 1.** Percentages of move use in funded and unfunded summaries.

Fig. 2. Percentages of step use in funded and unfunded summaries.

also be due to the lack of physical/digital resources available to academics in peripheral and precarious circumstances such as those of the Syrians. Without a university affiliation, it is difficult for would-be researchers to access recent scientific publications or tap into disciplinary networks. Clearly, this affects their ability to discuss the literature, refer to current issues or participate in ongoing debates. Relevant citations would establish the credibility of the writers as knowledgeable members of their disciplinary community and would help set the proposed research within its wider scientific context (Tardy, 2003). Step 2 also has the potential to affect the steps performed in the rest of the summary, particularly Step 7 (*Outcomes*), as discussed below.

Comparison of step use in Move 2 shows that there is little difference between funded and unfunded summaries in the frequency of Step 4 (*Proposed Research*), with percentages of 96% and 97.3% respectively. However, there is a small difference in the occurrence of Step 5 (*Methods*), with funded summaries at 85.2% as against unfunded at 81.3%. Analysing the steps in Move 3, it is clear that steps 9 (*Team Competence*) and 10 (*Cara Alignment*) are scarcely used by either set of summaries; nor do they appear in other analyses of proposal summaries, as seen in Table 1. They may therefore be considered less central to the construction of the summary and are not discussed further here. Step 6 (*Importance*) is underused in both sets of summaries, but funded summaries show higher frequencies than unfunded summaries (22.2% versus 15%). The largest difference in frequency is for Step 7 (*Research Outcomes*) (funded: 66.7%; unfunded: 40%), while there is a small difference in percentages for Step 8 (*Real-world Benefits*) at 59% (funded) and 62.7% (unfunded).

As these writers are relatively new to proposal writing, the low use of Step 6, especially in unfunded summaries, may indicate some reluctance to evaluate their own work as important, especially before it has been carried out. The higher percentage for funded summaries shows a greater level of confidence, which may in itself be a contributory factor in persuading assessors to fund the project. In contrast to Feng's (2006) researchers, unfunded summaries tend to rely on presenting the real-world benefits of the research rather than highlighting its contribution to the scientific community. This may partially reflect the above-mentioned paucity of references to previous research (Step 2), since without a clear account of how the proposed study fits into the wider picture of ongoing research, it becomes more difficult to envisage its future research contribution. It may also be a further consequence of difficulties in accessing the literature and of a lack of contact with the disciplinary community. The twin factors of inexperience and lack of resources can thus be seen as operating in tandem to create proposal summaries that are susceptible to rejection. While this affects both funded and unfunded researchers to a certain extent, it is the unfunded summaries that show clearer evidence of the impact of these two negative factors as seen in the low occurrence of research outcomes (Step 7). These summaries lack the marketisation deemed necessary by Feng and Shi (2004); that is they fail to promote their proposal sufficiently in the highly competitive environment of grant funding.

4.2. RQ2: What, if any, are the differences between Matzler's (2021) proposal abstracts and Cara funded and unfunded summaries in terms of their generic prototypicality?

Matzler (2021) identified a prototypical move structure, in which each move occurs only once and in the sequence given in Table 3. As noted above, the extent to which Cara summaries conform to Matzler's prototype is important in that it gives an indication of how far they are likely to fulfil reader expectations of the genre, thereby making the text easier and quicker for assessors to process.

Table 3
Comparison of Matzler's move analysis with Cara step analysis.

Matzler's (2021) prototypical move analysis	Corresponding Cara step analysis
Move 1 Territory	Step 1 Territory (including Step 2 Previous Research)
Move 2 Niche	Step 3 Niche
Move 3 Goal	Step 4 Proposed Research
Move 4 Means	Step 5 Methods
Move 5 Benefits	Step 7 Research Outcomes & Step 8 Real-world Benefits

Matzler's moves can be readily mapped onto our steps as seen in Table 3 and can be used to provide a basis for comparison with Cara summaries. It should be noted that Matzler does not distinguish a move equivalent to our Step 2 (*Previous Research*); thus for purposes of comparison this step is treated as part of Step 1 (*Territory*). Further, Matzler's Move 5 (*Benefits*) covers both our Step 7 (*Research Outcomes*) as well as Step 8 (*Real-world Benefits*). Percentages are calculated accordingly.

4.2.1. Move/step occurrence

The comparison of Cara summaries with Matzler's (2021) prototype rests on two factors, move/step occurrence and move/step sequencing. We start by examining move/step occurrence and Fig. 3 shows the percentages of Matzler's abstracts that contain each of his prototypical moves compared with the corresponding data for steps in Cara funded and unfunded summaries. This comparison reveals how closely funded and unfunded summaries approximate to the prototypical structure and the ways in which they differ. The Cara step that best conforms to the prototype in percentage occurrence is *Proposed Research*. Matzler considers the corresponding *Goal* move obligatory as it appears in all his abstracts and in fact Cara results for both funded and unfunded texts come close at 96.3% and 97.3% respectively. It is noticeable that the *Territory* and *Niche* steps record very similar percentages for funded and unfunded summaries, but in both cases these fall somewhat short of the percentages given by Matzler. He finds *Territory* to be an obligatory move, while Cara data stands at just under 90% occurrence. Similarly Matzler finds a considerably higher percentage of *Niche* moves (92%) than are present in the Cara data (81%). In both cases this difference of around 10% suggests that while most Cara summaries adhere to the prototype, some omit these important steps, thereby failing to situate and motivate their study adequately.

The most important differences both between funded and unfunded summaries as well as between Cara and Matzler's (2021) data are seen in the last two moves/steps: *Means* or *Methods* and *Benefits* or *Outcomes/Benefits*. Comparison with the prototype shows that both funded and unfunded Cara summaries underuse the *Methods* step. For Matzler this step is near obligatory occurring in 97% of abstracts; for unfunded summaries the figure is only 77%, while funded summaries come somewhat closer at 85% occurrence. According to Feng and Shi (2004, p. 16), the importance of methods in the summary is evidenced by the high percentage of words devoted to the function, which they describe as a 'unique feature'. When there are no results to report, the soundness and viability of a proposed study is most likely to be judged on the validity of its method. By contrast, in RAs and their abstracts, the importance of the methods section may have declined (Samraj, 2005; Swales, 1990). Given the occluded nature of the proposal genre and Cara researchers' lack of access to supportive academic networks, it is probable that their summaries are based primarily on their reading of RAs, which would account for the failure of some summaries to include a *Methods* step. The *Research Outcomes* step is also relatively underused by unfunded researchers, as already discussed, so it is no surprise to see that even combined with the *Benefits* step, the occurrence of this function is low in comparison to the prototype, with only 65% occurrence as against 81% in Matzler's data. Percentages for this step in funded summaries are close to the prototype, at 82%.

To sum up, this analysis of move/step occurrence has highlighted some of the ways in which Cara summaries deviate from the prototype. Of particular concern is the extent of underuse of steps, which is evident for unfunded summaries in all steps except *Proposed Research*, while funded summaries show underuse of *Territory*, *Niche* and *Methods* steps. While a certain amount of non-prototypical occurrence is bound to occur due to differences between the disciplines and topics addressed, it is also clear that the omission of steps considered essential to a well-formed summary is likely to affect the success of the proposal and again may well be due to the lack of experience and resources faced by these researchers working in peripheral contexts.

4.2.2. Move/step sequencing

While space does not allow the investigation of all the sequencing issues that are evident in these texts, we can gain some idea of the extent to which funded and unfunded summaries follow the prototypical sequence by looking at the moves/steps that appear in initial and final position. The initial step of a summary is important as the point of departure for the text and affects the development and sequencing of what remains. Percentages of the two most frequent initial moves/steps appear in Fig. 4. Comparing the sequencing for Cara summaries with that found by Matzler (2021), there is reasonable agreement as to the initial move/step, with Matzler recording
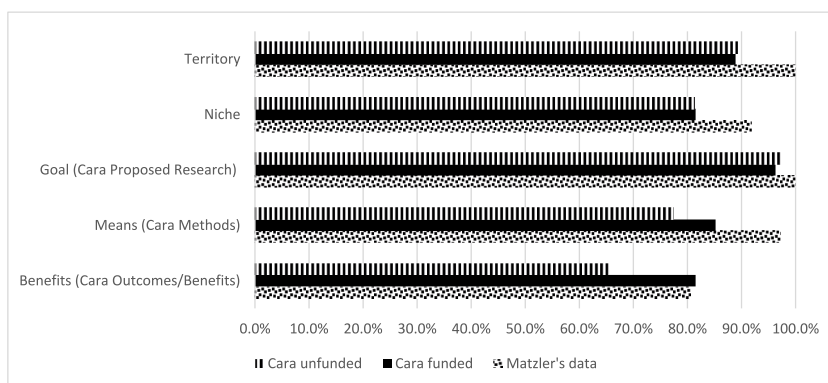

Fig. 3. Percentages of prototypical moves in Matzler's (2021) abstracts compared with corresponding Cara step data for funded and unfunded summaries.
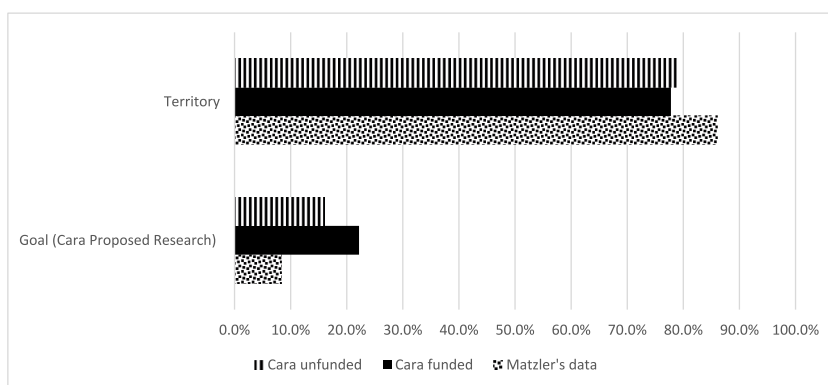
Fig. 4. Percentages of the most frequent Matzler (2021) moves and Cara steps in initial position.

86.1% occurrence of *Territory,* while around 78% of both funded and unfunded Cara summaries begin with this step, as exemplified in (1) below.

(1) *Portland cement-based concrete is the most used material in the construction industry.* (N_Sep18_27)

However, the second highest initial move in Matzler (2021), *Goal,* appears in only 8.3% of abstracts, while the equivalent step in both funded and unfunded summaries is much higher at 22.2% and 16% respectively. Matzler considers the use of *Goal* in initial position to be an important variant of the prototypical pattern, which has the effect of highlighting the importance of the proposed research, emphasising its novelty and establishing the authority of the researcher. As Matzler points out, however, if *Goal* is to maintain its impact, it should only occur once, whereas when *Proposed Research* occurs initially in funded summaries the step is repeated in half of the four instances, while repetition is much higher in unfunded summaries at 11 out of 12 occurrences (91.7%). This repetition shows a lack of skill in managing the transitions between steps and has the effect of diminishing the impact of the *Proposed Research* step by including redundant information which renders the summary rather repetitive and unappealing. Repetition is in bold in (2) below.

(2) **The proposed** *project aims at* **exploring how Syrians are discussed** *and portrayed in* **Turkish** *social media and, in particularly,* **Twitter** *…*

The proposed *research will* **explore how Syrian** *migrants* **are discussed** *on* **Twitter in Turkey** *…* (Y_Dec20_13T12)

While the initial move/step is critical in establishing how the summary will develop, the final move/step is also important, as it has the potential to highlight the primary take-home message of the text. As shown in Fig. 5, 63.9% of Matzler's (2021) abstracts use *Benefits* to close the text. Cara funded data are in line with this finding, with over 66.7% of summaries using *Outcomes* and/or *Benefits* as the final step; the lower percentage (53.3%) of unfunded summaries with these steps in final position is a reflection of the lower occurrence of these steps overall, as seen earlier in Fig. 2. However, the most striking difference between Cara data and Matzler's results is the use of *Proposed Research* in final position, which occurs in 18.5% of funded and 17.3% of unfunded summaries, as against just 2.8% for Matzler's corresponding *Goal* move. Although Matzler considers *Goal* to be flexible in position, its use as a final move is rare in his data, suggesting that Cara use is anomalous here. In fact, the occurrence of *Proposed Research* in final position is most likely
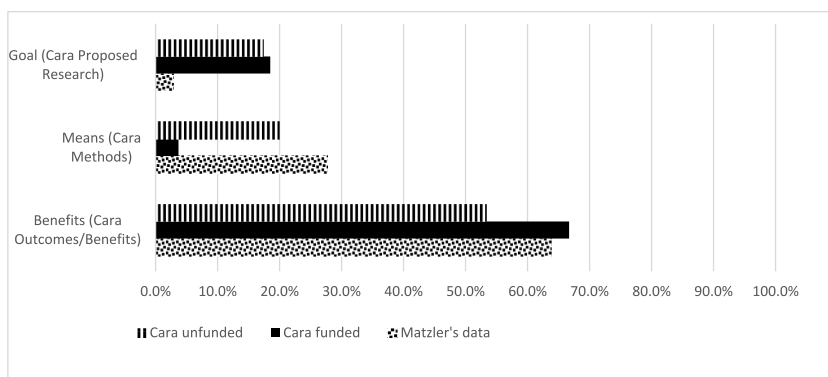

Fig. 5. Percentages of the most frequent Matzler (2021) moves and Cara steps in final position.

to be the result of the omission of *Outcomes/Benefits* entirely. This is the case in the large majority of summaries which use *Proposed Research* as the final step. It could be that writers consider it necessary to make a strong ending and, lacking the research background or confidence to use *Outcomes/Benefits*, they opt for repeating the aims of the study. This supposition is confirmed by the presence of the lexis *aim(s)* or *objective(s)* in the majority of summaries of this type, as illustrated in example (3).

(3) *Our project **objective** is to deploy a CNN model for detection (classification) on Raspberry Pi to control the wheelchair to detect and avoid obstacles.* (N_Dec20_18)

Another potentially important variant noted by Matzler (2021) in 27.8% of his texts, is to end with *Means*, while in Cara summaries the use of the equivalent step *Methods* in final position is much lower at 18.5% for unfunded and just 3.7% for funded summaries. The example Matzler gives is of the sequence *Goal→Benefits→Means*, corresponding to Cara *Proposed Research→Outcomes/Benefits→Methods*. However, in the Cara data, ending with *Methods* is again more likely to be the result of omitting *Outcomes/Benefits* entirely, which is the case in most of the summaries that end in this way, as seen in example (4). The very low percentage of final *Methods* steps in funded summaries may thus be due to their relatively high use of *Outcomes/Benefits*. The crucial role of *Outcomes/Benefits* is evident in the knock-on effects visible in the rest of the text.

(4) *Thus, the data will then be analysed using the SPSS program and context analysis.* (N_Jul19_21)

For sequencing, then, a mixed picture emerges in which, despite differences in frequency, Cara funded and unfunded summaries accord with Matzler's (2021) most salient findings, i.e. the use of a *Territory* move/step at the beginning of the summary and a *Benefits/Outcomes* move/step in final position. Where Cara summaries differ substantially from those of Matzler is in the occurrence of *Proposed Research*, which is much higher in Cara data both to begin and end the summary and the use of *Methods* in final position (higher in Matzler's data). In both cases, this usage may well be due to limited experience, given the occluded nature of the genre and the lack of support from experienced academics. We would suggest that this is indicative of the difference between Matzler's 'emerging' researchers, who although not yet experts, are career academics working within relatively well-resourced higher educational settings and the Syrian researchers, operating in peripheral and under-resourced circumstances.

5. Pedagogical applications

Flowerdew (2016, p. 4) has characterised the summary as 'Promissory, Promotional, Persuasive and Problem-oriented', but due especially to the underuse of *Research Outcomes*, the unfunded summaries fall short on the first three of these aspects. A possible pedagogic response would be to ask learners to note the position of *Research Outcomes* as the final step in the summary and to discuss its importance. They could then identify promissory, promotional and persuasive elements within examples of the step and compile a list of lexico-grammatical realisations for use in their own writing. The promissory nature of the expected results can be seen in the use of the modal verb *will* and verbs such as *anticipate* and *expect* and is often combined with promotional and/or persuasive language, as seen in the following Cara examples.

(5) *we **anticipate** this project **will address existing knowledge gaps** and **improve** knowledge exchange about …* (Y_Dec20_22)
(6) *The findings of the project **will contribute to** the growing body of research dealing with …* (Y_Dec20_16T16)
(7) *The researcher **is expected to** reach several results, **the most important of which are:*** (N_Sep18_13)

In relation to Matzler's (2021) prototype, the summaries by Cara periphery researchers differ most markedly in the underuse of *Methods*. In order to raise awareness of the position and importance of methods in the summary, learners could be asked to compare an RA abstract with a proposal summary, to discuss differences found in the presentation of methods and possible reasons for any discrepancies. In terms of lexico-grammar, learners will likely find a difference in the tense used i.e. past/present in the RA abstract and future/present in the proposal summary, since the work has not yet been performed. Passive forms may also be noted and learners can be asked to identify useful phraseology, including *in order to/to* for signalling the purpose of applying the method and the prevalence of *–ing* forms to explain how the method is carried out, as illustrated in examples (8) and (9).

(8) *The researchers **will use** a purposive sampling technique **in order to ensure** the relevance of the participants …* (N_Dec20_37)
(9) *Data **will be stored and analysed using** offline computers in secure premises …* (Y_Dec20_22)

Although we have noted here some options for teaching only two steps: *Research Outcomes* and *Methods*, the approaches we have mentioned are readily applicable to other steps and instructors will be able to tailor these suggestions to the needs of their individual classes.

6. Conclusions

This study has examined the grant proposal summaries written by researchers operating from a peripheral context, many of whom were under-experienced in this genre. It has carried out what we believe to be the first move/step analysis of both funded and unfunded summaries and shown that there are important differences between them in the way they deploy these generic resources. Although

failure to gain funding may not be a direct consequence of these differences, it is argued that such linguistic/rhetorical factors may well play a part in the rejection of proposals. In particular, unfunded summaries are found to underplay the value of their research, both in terms of its importance and through their omission of the step *Research Outcomes*. Clearly, the peripheral and precarious circumstances in which Cara researchers work impacts their ability to access both the literature and disciplinary research networks. However, the tendency to undervalue their own research may well also be characteristic of other researchers with limited experience. Lacking extensive knowledge of their field, they may be reluctant to promote the value of their own work, especially when it has not yet been carried out, and this attitude is likely to be exacerbated when they also lack networks of more experienced academics to support them. The findings of this study are likely to be relevant, then, not just to other periphery researchers, but to less experienced proposal writers more generally.

We also compared funded and unfunded summaries with the prototypical analysis put forward by Matzler (2021). The results showed that many of our texts were unprototypical in move/step occurrence or sequencing. This was most noticeable in the much lower percentages of Cara summaries that included *Methods* and *Outcomes/Benefits,* two functions that are less likely to occur in the more visible and familiar genre of the RA abstract. It is therefore essential that less experienced and early career researchers have access to real-world examples of proposals so that they can model their writing on authentic examples of the genre in question.

There are some limitations that should be borne in mind when considering the findings of this study. First, space did not allow for an in-depth study of sequencing issues or word counts of moves/steps. Further investigation of funded and unfunded summaries in order to show the most frequent sequences of steps and their proportionate word allocation would be useful. Second, as mentioned earlier, due to the large number of different disciplines represented in the study, it was not feasible to provide disciplinary interview data to supplement the textual findings. Our primary concern here was to expand the number of texts examined, rather than to research individual disciplines in detail. Future studies which investigated proposals from a smaller number of specific disciplines in more depth would further develop our understanding of this genre. This study has broken new ground, however, by presenting the first analysis of the differences between funded and unfunded proposal summaries and has highlighted the key importance of access to academic resources and networks for researchers embarking upon the task of writing funding proposals. Its findings have resulted in knowledge which has immediate practical applications in supporting and facilitating inexperienced and periphery scholars' ability to engage proactively in the research sphere.

Declarations of interest

None.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Maggie Charles: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Karin Whiteside:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis.

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Maggie Charles taught academic writing at Oxford University for many years and currently works on the Cara EAP programme for exiled Syrian academics. Her research interests are in the analysis of academic discourse and the use of corpora in writing pedagogy, areas in which she has published widely.

Karin Whiteside is Associate Professor and Head of EAP in the International Study and Language Institute, University of Reading, and has worked on the Cara Syria Programme since 2017. She is interested, both as a practitioner and researcher, in genre, disciplinary discourses, and corpus affordances in EAP.