



Demystifying a Rare Spoken Genre: Rhetorical Move Structure of Oral Presentations of Thesis Defenses in Applied Linguistics

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<p>Received 02/10/2024</p> <p>Received in revised form 30/10/2025</p> <p>Accepted 05/11/2025</p>	<h3>ABSTRACT</h3> <p>In recent decades, academic oral presentations have emerged as a significant spoken genre. The oral presentation of a graduate thesis defense (OPTD) has a pivotal role in the rites of passage for graduate students in graduate education. However, this academic spoken genre remains relatively overlooked in current EAP genre research since the majority of genre analyses have historically focused on written academic discourse. This study attempts to redress this gap by examining the rhetorical move structure of 18 OPTDs in applied linguistics. To this end, it has adapted Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework and employs a combined top-down and bottom-up approach. The results show that OPTDs consist of 20 moves which can be divided into seven phases: Initiation, Introduction, Literature Review, Method and Procedure, Results and Discussion, Conclusion and Termination. The rhetorical move structure of OPTDs closely follows the structure of thesis writing while also revealing some unique features particular to oral presentations. The moves and steps identified in the present study enhance an</p>
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	<p>understanding of OPTD genre knowledge, offering comprehensive templates and references for graduate students within the time constraints of an oral presentation.</p> <p>Keywords: academic oral presentations, thesis defense, genre analysis, rhetorical move structure, ESP/EAP</p>
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Introduction

Thesis defenses, also referred to as *viva voce* or *viva*, serve as oral examinations for master's or doctoral candidates, representing a significant milestone and a rite of passage in their academic journey before degree conferral (Bastola & Ho, 2023; Mežek & Swales, 2016). They are an integral part of academic communication, alongside other essential forms such as conferences (Burhan-Horasanhı, 2024), seminars (Lindenberg, 2023), and lectures (Deng & Wannaruk, 2021). Part of the academic journey for graduate students during a thesis defense is the Oral Presentation of a Thesis Defense (OPTD), a globally recognized component in graduate education, following a standardized format across countries, but subject to university-specific variations (Mežek & Swales, 2016). The OPTD adopts a monologic mode constrained by time, characterized by narrative structure and informational content. The OPTD aims to showcase the student's critical evaluation skills, essential for success in both academic and professional realms, emphasizing the importance of mastering academic oral presentation skills (Tian & Mahmud, 2018). However, according to Kimouche (2022), many presenters, even advanced learners, find OPTDs challenging because they need to adapt to presenting dense information despite preparation and rehearsals. They are often unclear about their organization of the content and how to make an effective academic oral presentation, particularly for an oral defense, which differs from in-class presentations or conferences. Surprisingly, many students do not receive professional guidance in delivering OPTDs, as it is often assumed they already possess these skills.

To help presenters acquire genre knowledge and understand the organization of their oral presentations, this study followed a genre-based approach. There are three main reasons for this rationale. Firstly, previous studies have shown that genre analysis theories effectively disentangle and dissect academic oral presentations (Dubois, 1980; Lee, 2016). Specifically, move analysis can prepare presenters for OPTD, reducing anxiety during the defense process (Žareva, 2013). Therefore, this study uses move analysis as its theoretical basis. Secondly, to become an expert member of a discourse community, one must be familiar with the genre conventions, which represent a challenge for novices who have yet to complete the process of language

socialization (Swales, 2004). Thirdly, as a rare spoken genre, OPTDs possess unique characteristics that are often overlooked in research (Kimouche, 2022). This oversight is partly due to limited data accessibility, as evidenced by the scarcity of OPTD examples in well-known academic spoken corpora like the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) and British Academic Spoken English (BASE) (Bastola & Ho, 2023). To fill this research gap, the present study investigates the rhetorical move structure of OPTDs in spoken discourse.

Literature Review

Definition of Genre

The word "genre" comes from the French for "kind" or "class." It is often the case that there are considerable differences of opinion regarding the definition of specific genres. Swales (1990) proposed a definition of genre as a collective of communicative acts united by a shared purpose and recognized by members of a discourse community. Swales' (1990) characterization of genre is widely regarded as comprehensive and influential, offering a holistic understanding of genre, encompassing its components and the influence of schematic structure on content and stylistic choices. In addition, Swales' definition serves as a foundational concept for the elaboration of genre by Bhatia (1993), who extends Swales' framework to incorporate professional contexts, sub-genres within genres, and the mixing of genres.

Genre analysis involves two key terms: "move", and "sub-move" or "step." Moves are parts of written or spoken texts that serve a communicative function. Instead of referring to a "step", Swales (1990) used the term "sub-move," which serves a similar purpose. In the current study, the terms "move" and "step" are used.

An ESP Approach Adopted as the Theoretical Framework for Genre Analysis

Genre can be viewed from three different aspects: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), New Rhetoric (NR) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The genre studies of these three aspects represent different perspectives, from theorization to research and pedagogy, and they share some similarities as well (Hyon, 1996).

The present study adopts an ESP approach to provide a theoretical framework for genre analysis. In contrast to the NR and SFL approaches, the ESP approach is an eclectic theoretical foundation that focuses specifically

on non-native English speakers in academic and professional contexts. Additionally, ESP places more emphasis on occupational and academic training in the educational context, whereas NR and SFL are more focused on L1 disciplinary contexts. Most importantly, ESP researchers investigate the structures and meanings of texts, which aligns with the primary focus of SFL. However, there is a difference in how ESP and SFL researchers view genres. SFL characterizes genres in terms of broad rhetorical patterns, such as narratives, recounts, arguments, and expositions, which are called elemental genres. In contrast, ESP analysts view genres differently. They focus more on the role of social communities and the linguistic features of genres. In this study, the ESP approach is better suited for the present study's research needs due to its linguistic focus and emphasis on the role of social communities.

Previous Studies on Move Analysis in Academic Oral Presentations

In terms of speech events, genre studies on academic oral presentations involve various speech events, such as conference presentations (Dubois, 1980; Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005), Ph.D. defenses (Mežek & Swales, 2016; Swales, 2004), academic lectures (Deng & Wannaruk, 2021; Lee, 2016), TED talks (Chang & Huang, 2015), and 3MT (Three Minute Thesis) presentations (Hu & Liu, 2018).

In terms of the sections involved in a move analysis, most previous studies focused on a specific section instead of a complete speech event. Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas (2005) explored the move structure of conference presentations focusing specifically on the Introduction section. Xu (2022) conducted a genre-based analysis focusing on Q&A sessions after conference paper presentations in computer science. The studies mentioned above concentrate on a particular segment rather than the entire event. There are a few research studies on the complete speech event. Hu and Liu (2018) analyzed a corpus of 142 presentations by PhD students from four disciplines and identified eight distinct rhetorical moves in the 3MT presentations, including six obligatory moves (i.e., Orientation, Rationale, Purpose, Methods, Implication, and Termination) and two optional ones (i.e., Framework and Results). More recently, Deng and Wannaruk (2021) adapted Swales' (1990) move analysis framework to examine the rhetorical move structure of lectures given by native English and Chinese lecturers. They identified moves and steps in three phases, namely, the opening phase, the theme network building phase and the closing phase. Apart from the aforementioned studies on oral presentations, there is a lack of studies on OPTDs.

There are some studies related to thesis defenses, but they look at the oral examination process that doctoral students undergo before being awarded their doctoral degree. For example, Mežek and Swales (2016)

explored the structure, procedures, and variations of PhD defenses in different countries. Swales (2004) also explored the rhetorical move structure of four doctoral defenses in different disciplines at an American university. But both these studies focus on the whole procedure of a defense, instead of only the oral presentation. To the best of my knowledge, there is no study in the social sciences and humanities that concentrates on the genre analysis of oral presentations of proposal and thesis defenses from an ESP perspective. Therefore, to fill the research gap, the present study aims to investigate the rhetorical move structure of OPTDs.

Method

Data Collection

A corpus was compiled from 18 OPTDs in the field of applied linguistics. These presentations were delivered live online by non-native English-speaking students (11 Chinese, 4 Vietnamese, 3 Thai) between 2020 and 2023 at a Thai university with over a decade of experience in offering international graduate programs. This timeframe was chosen as the period of 2020–2023 afforded a contemporary, accessible, and sizable corpus—a direct consequence of the widespread adoption of online defenses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each presentation which usually lasts up to 30 minutes was delivered to an examining committee of 4-5 members, which included 2-3 external examiners from other universities, with the rest being internal faculty. The sessions were streamed online to a non-participating audience. Based on the purpose of the present study, the selection of 18 OPTDs was based on the following criteria: 1) The presentations should be complete and based on the presenters' written proposals or written theses. 2) The presentations should be from graduate students who have passed their oral examinations. 3) The participants should be graduate students from the School of Foreign Languages. 4) The recordings of each presentation should be of good sound and video quality. 5) The data collection of presentations spanned from 2020 to 2023.

In total, the running words of the OPTDs added up to 60,642 words, transcribed from approximately 9 hours of video recordings. The average length for an OPTD was 3,369 words with a range from about 2,147 to 4,998 words. Among these video recordings, fourteen are from PhD students and four from MA students.

According to Flowerdew's (2004) criteria, an adequate size for a specialized corpus should be in the range of 20,000–250,000 words, so a corpus of 18 oral presentations is still an appropriate size for the present study which is qualitative in nature. Although the research site cannot

represent all the cases in other universities, it is important to realize that the value of qualitative research lies in the detailed descriptions and themes developed in the context of a specific site. There should be a preference for particularity over generalizability (Greene & Caracelli, 1997).

Data Analysis

This study identified moves and steps employing a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches. According to Biber et al. (2007), a top-down approach begins with the analysis of communicative functions, while a bottom-up approach starts with the analysis of linguistic features. Flowerdew (2002) argued that the top-down approach was ideal for exposition when identifying schematic structures in genre analysis. However, in practice, integrating a bottom-up approach, which includes grammatical and lexical features, was also necessary. Solely relying on a top-down approach was impractical due to its limitations, particularly in accounting for new communicative functions that may emerge in the analyzed corpus (Moreno & Swales, 2018).

Given the lack of an appropriate framework for move analysis in the context of online oral presentations of graduate thesis defenses in ELF, this study adapted Chen and Kuo's (2012) framework (see Appendix). This framework was chosen for its comprehensive move structure for all sections in written theses in applied linguistics and its wide citation in move structure analysis (He & Pramoolsook, 2022; Maher & Milligan, 2019). Texts in this study were coded at the step level, as this level is most useful for investigating the function-form gap (Moreno & Swales, 2018). The length of a move varied, with any sentence or group of sentences possessing a communicative purpose considered a move. The coding process involved identifying the most dominant communicative purpose in cases of move embedding and added new codes for emerging moves and steps. Initial coding schemes were refined until all the transcripts were coded and functional units identified. To determine the conventionality of the moves/steps, a cut-off point of 50% was set: moves occurring in less than 50% of cases were categorized as optional, those occurring in 50-99% were conventional, and those appearing in all presentations (100%) were considered obligatory. In the present study, 18 transcripts were labeled from TD01 to TD18.

Inter-coder and Intra-coder Reliability

To enhance reliability in move identification, both inter-coder and intra-coder reliability checks were conducted. Inter-coder reliability procedures included coder selection, training, independent coding, and

agreement. A doctorate student with extensive experience in movement analysis was invited as the inter-coder. The second coder received training on move descriptions, prototype examples, and textual boundary signs. A total of six presentations (33% of the corpus) was randomly selected from the OPTDs and coded separately by the researcher and the inter-coder. Discrepancies were resolved through discussions between the researcher and the inter-coder until a consensus was reached.

Intra-coder reliability, which checks the coder's consistency, was assessed by re-analyzing six presentations two months after the initial coding in the present study. The percentage agreement rate was used to calculate inter-coder and intra-coder reliability, as suggested by Rau and Shih (2021), because it is a valid measure for move analysis, given the emergence of new communicative purposes during the coding process. This method is also simpler to interpret and widely used, computed with the formula $A/(A+D) \times 100$, where A is the number of agreements and D is the number of disagreements. In the present study, the identification of moves yielded 89% inter-coder agreement and 96% intra-coder agreement. These relatively high percentages suggest that the results for move identification are reliable.

Results and Discussion

This study identified 20 moves in OPTDs, which were divided into seven phases: Initiation (“Ini”), Introduction (“Intr”), Literature Review (“Lr”), Method and Procedure (“M”), Results and Discussion (“R&D”), Conclusion (“C”) and Termination (“T”). The frequency and status of the moves/steps in each phase are presented in order in the following sections.

1. Moves/Steps in the Initiation Phase

In OPTDs, three moves were found in the Initiation Phase which included M1 (Starting the presentation), M2 (Announcing the topic) and M3 (Outlining the presentation). The frequency and status of each move/step in this phase are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency and Status of Moves/Steps in the Initiation Phase

Move/Step	Frequency	Status
M1 Starting the presentation		
S1 Greetings and Identifying oneself	18 (100%)	Obligatory
S2 Thanking the committee members or/and audience	8 (44%)	Optional

and/or chair and/or acknowledgment of supervisor(s)		
M2 Announcing the topic	18 (100%)	Obligatory
M3 Outlining the presentation	18 (100%)	Obligatory

M1 (Starting the presentation) signals the start of an oral presentation and it is often realized by a combination of greetings and/ or expressing gratitude.

S1 (Greetings and Identifying oneself) serves to greet the audience and introduce the presenter.

Example:

Hi everyone, I'm XXX, and today I'm here to give a presentation about my dissertation. (TD02)

S2 (Thanking the committee members or/and audience and/or chair and/or acknowledgment of supervisor(s)) aims to express thanks for the presence of the audience and/or make an acknowledgment of committee members and/or supervisor(s) for their help and support.

Example:

First of all, I would like to thank all the committee members for your constructive suggestions and support during ... (TD02)

M2 (Announcing the topic) introduces the topic of the research. There are some linguistic signals such as "The title of my presentation is....", and "I'm going to talk about...".

Example:

And **the title of my thesis is XXX.** (TD18)

M3 (Outlining the presentation) introduces the outline of the presentation. There are some linguistic signals such as "(be) divided into" and "the outline of...".

Example:

So, my presentation will **be divided into** five main parts:
Background of the study, research questions ... (TD03)

These three moves in the Initiation Phase were all found to be obligatory. The moves in this phase were also reported in other spoken genres such as TED talks (Chang & Huang, 2015), conference presentations (Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005) and lectures (Lee, 2016).

2. Moves/Steps in the Introduction Phase

The communicative purpose of this phase is to establish worth, in other words, to explain why the presentation should be conducted. This phase includes three moves which are M4 (Establishing a territory), M5 (Establishing a niche) and M6 (Occupying the niche). Table 2 presents the frequency and status of each move/step in this phase.

Table 2

Frequency and Status of Moves/Steps in the Introduction Phase

Move/Step	Frequency	Status
M4 Establishing a territory		
S1 Providing topic generalization/background	11 (61%)	conventional
S2 Indicating the centrality/importance of the topic	9 (50%)	conventional
M5 Establishing a niche		
S1 Indicating problem(s) and/or need(s) and/or motivation	12 (67%)	conventional
S2 Indicating the research gap in previous research	9 (50%)	conventional
M6 Occupying the niche		
S1 Indicating research aims/objectives/ purposes	11 (61%)	conventional
S2 Proposing research questions or hypothesis	13 (72%)	conventional

M4 (Establishing a territory) aims to establish the significance of the research within this field. To achieve this communicative function, two steps were used as below:

S1 (Providing topic generalizations/background) aims to generalize the topic or provide a background to the topic. It usually reports on a broad topic.

Example:

Let's start with the Introduction. As you know, English has developed as a global language socially, economically and culturally... (TD01)

S2 (Indicating the centrality/importance of the topic) indicates the importance or shows the centrality of the topic.

Example:

And it has become an indispensable tool for communication in many fields. Despite the importance of listening skills, learners are still... (TD01)

M5 (Establishing a niche) draws the audiences' attention by presenting some problems and focusing on the lack of previous research that

needs new investigations. M5 is realized by the following two steps:

S1 (Indicating problem(s) and/or need(s) and/or motivation) involves identifying the problem, need, or motivation that drives a study.

Example:

However, many students are unable to achieve good grades when taking these exams...And the second is the Statement of the Problem, [...] identified their existing problems including low reading interest, unsatisfied [unsatisfactory] reading achievement... (TD17)

S2 (Indicating the research gap in previous research) indicates a gap in previous research.

Example:

Meanwhile, previous research had established the close connection between prosody and listening comprehension. However, the importance of prosody in achieving listening skills is inadequately addressed in the Vietnam context. (TD01)

M6 (Occupying the niche) describes the present research being conducted and how it can be realized by the following two steps:

S1 (Indicating research aims/objectives/ purposes) indicates the research aims/objectives/purposes of the present study. Some linguistic signals such as "to investigate..." "to explore..." and "to examine..." appear frequently in this step.

Example:

So, this is [these are] the objective[objectives] of my study. First, **to investigate** [...] Secondly, **to investigate** [...] Thirdly, **to examine** the relationship between [...] and lastly, **to explore** ... (TD01)

S2 (Proposing research questions or hypothesis) aims to show the research questions or hypothesis for the present study.

Example:

Five research questions were proposed accordingly with the first two dealing with ...question three and question four focusing on ...and question five on (TD11)

The three moves in the Introduction phase share a similarity with the main moves in Swales' (1990) CARS model for research article introductions. Compared to the comprehensive model of Chen and Kuo (2012), which focuses on academic written theses, some steps found in Chen and Kuo's

model were not found in the present study. For instance, the step "Reviewing previous research" was not observed in the present study. This discrepancy is likely due to the time constraints of the spoken discourse.

3. Moves/Steps in the Literature Review Phase

In the Literature Review Phase, three moves are identified, including M7 (Establishing one part of the territory for one's research), M8 (Creating a research niche in response to M7), and M9 (Occupying the research niche). Detailed results and discussion of this phase are shown as follows:

Table 3

Frequency and Status of Moves/ Steps in the Literature Review Phase

Move/Step	Frequency	Status
M7 Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research		
S1 Surveying the non-research-related phenomena or knowledge claims	14(78%)	conventional
S2 Claiming centrality	8 (44%)	optional
M8 Creating a research niche (in response to Move7)		
S1 Counter-claiming	3(17%)	optional
S2 Gap-indicating	5(28%)	optional
M9 Occupying the research niche		
S1 Announcing theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks	8 (44%)	optional
S2 Announcing research design/processes	8 (44%)	optional

M7 Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research

The communicative objectives of this move are achieved through the following two steps:

S1 Surveying the non-research-related phenomena or knowledge claims

According to Kwan (2006), this step shows impartial descriptions that predominantly align with the semantic characteristics of M4S1 (Providing topic generalization/background) in the Introduction Phase. This phase will involve coding content, such as definitions or clarifications of terms, theoretical constructs, expert opinions, and descriptions of non-research practices or phenomena relevant to the thematic topics (Kwan, 2006).

Example:

It proposed that the corpus-based move analysis by Biber 2007 is suitable for exploring [...] Meanwhile, Hyland says the framework in the model of Interaction 2005 was proposed as an appropriate framework for conducting a corpus-based

investigation in the current study. (TD09)

It is worth noting that in the current study, this step (M7S1) was expanded upon by summarizing prior research, which is considered accepted knowledge. Consequently, this additional dimension is integrated into this particular step. It is a conventional step, which enjoys the highest frequency under M7. This result is consistent with a previous study conducted by Chen and Kuo (2012).

S2 Claiming centrality

This step explicitly emphasizes the significance of reviewing the themes within the presenter's own thesis or dissertation, or it demonstrates the importance, interest, or relevance in some way (Kwan, 2006). Linguistic features commonly associated with this step include phrases like "It is important to," "It is significant that," and "growing interest over," among others.

Example:

Now I will turn to the literature review. Scholars have been
mostly interested in ... (TD02)

In contrast to prior studies by Kwan (2006) and Chen and Kuo (2012) which focus on written discourse, the step of "surveying research-related phenomena," reported by Kwan (2006) and Chen and Kuo (2012), is notably absent in the current study. This divergence may be attributed to the time constraints inherent in spoken discourse where presenters may not have sufficient time to delve into previous research in the same depth as in written genres, thus leading to the exclusion of certain steps.

M8 Creating a research niche (in response to Move7)

This Move assesses the state of the field and critically identifies a problem or weakness in ongoing intellectual endeavors (You & Li, 2021). The communicative objectives of this move are achieved through the following two steps:

S1 Counter-claiming

This step serves the purpose of scrutinizing the epistemological and ontological shortcomings present in current efforts to understand the topic, as well as issues associated with existing research or non-research practices (Kwan, 2006). Counterarguments have been raised concerning the credibility of past studies, conflicting findings, methodological constraints, or the utilization of inappropriate theoretical frameworks (Bastola & Ho, 2023).

Example:

Most of the studies have been confined to a genre-based, pedagogy-oriented circle...However, this cannot represent the

whole view. (TD12)

S2 Gap-indicating

This step emphasizes identifying gaps in epistemic and non-epistemic practices, insufficient understanding of a particular phenomenon, or the necessity for further research or action beyond research.

Example:

Little research has investigated the effects of combining these activities with the metacognitive instruction. But **rare studies** have investigated the effectiveness of metacognitive instruction on self-efficacy... (TD10)

M8S2 in the present study was found to be optional, which aligns with the results shown in a previous study of Pieketaleyee and Bazargani (2018). However, a similar step M5S2 in the Introduction Phase shows a conventional use which accounts for 50% of the frequency. One of the possible reasons is that the presenter may not repeat the research gap in M8 because of time constraints.

M9 (Occupying the research niche) introduces the present study, which is achieved by the following two steps:

S1 (Announcing theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks) aims at naming the concept(s)/perspective/theory to be employed, combined or discussed.

Example:

This study used the trichotomous divisions classification of positive neutral and negative connotation. (TD02)

S2 (Announcing research design/processes) announces the research design or research processes.

Example:

So the underlaying (underlying) principle of these theories. I propose an alternative model of the listening process and use direct techniques to give the student the... the optimal listening conditions. (TD03)

4. Moves/Steps in the Method and Procedure Phase

In the Method and Procedure Phase, three moves identified include M10 (Presenting an overview of the methodological approach), M11 (Describing data collection method and procedure(s)), and M12 (Describing the data analysis method and procedure(s)). The details regarding the

frequency and status of each move/step in this phase are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency and Status of Moves/Steps in the Method and Procedure Phase

Move/Step	Frequency	Status
M10 Presenting an overview of the methodological approach	12 (67%)	conventional
M11 Describing data collection method and procedure(s)		
S1 Describing the sample (participants, location, time, etc.)	14(78%)	conventional
S2 Describing methods and steps in data collection	15 (83%)	conventional
M12 Describing data analysis method and procedure(s)		
S1 Explaining specific method(s) of data analysis	8 (44%)	optional
S2 Recounting data analysis procedure(s)	9 (50%)	conventional

M10 (Presenting an overview of the methodological approach) provides a broad overview of the research design or the general approach employed in the present study. This move is normally given before describing a procedure for data collection.

Example:

Now I will explain my research methodology briefly. This is my research framework; it would be like this... (TD02)

M11 (Describing data collection method and procedure(s)) provides the method and procedure(s) for collecting data. This move was realized by the following two steps:

S1 (Describing the sample) describes a sample of the research conducted by describing participants, location, size, time, and other related characteristics of the sample.

Example:

This study recruited 132 participants from three intact classes. They were divided into three groups and each group received different online listening practices. (TD10)

S2 (Describing methods and steps in data collection) involves detailing the related methods and procedures for collecting data. Sampling techniques, the instruments, intervention and experiment procedure are included in this step. There are some lexical signals describing procedures such as "First..." "next..." "then..." and "Finally...".

Example:

Then the treatments of the study. [...] the control group was taught with the grammar translation method and task-based language teaching. And the Experiment group was [...] The **first** activity is [...] **Then** [...] The **next** activity is [...] Then it's the procedures of data collection. First, the researcher [...] Then... (TD17)

M12 (Describing data analysis method and procedure(s)) elucidates the data analysis procedures by analyzing data, testing the research hypotheses, and seeking answers to the research questions formulated. This move is realized by the following steps:

S1 (Explaining specific method(s) of data analysis) involves conveying to the audience the particular method(s) employed for data analysis in the study. It is worth noting that this step, classified as optional, can be also found in Chen and Kuo's (2012) research.

Example:

And for the data, I analyzed the quantitative data by using SPSS22. I conducted both descriptive analysis and frequency analysis. And for the qualitative data analysis, I used content analysis and thematic analysis. (TD12)

S2 (Recounting data analysis procedure(s)) serves to recount the steps taken in analyzing the data in chronological order.

Example:

The present study adopted a full diagnostic criterion to identify [...] **Then** the identified [...] **Then** [...] and [...] were compared. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted. (TD11)

5. Moves/Steps in the Results and Discussion Phase

In the Results and Discussion Phase, as shown in Table 5, three moves were identified.

Table 5

Frequency and Status of Moves/Steps in the Results and Discussion Phase

Move/Step	Frequency	Status
M13 Preparatory information for introducing results		
S1 Reviewing revisions after the pilot study	9(50%)	conventional
S2 Providing background information or how results are presented	14(78%)	conventional
M14 Reporting results		
S1 Introducing graphics	13 (72%)	conventional
S2 Reporting major findings	18 (100%)	obligatory
M15 Commenting on results		

Move/Step	Frequency	Status
S1 Interpreting results	11(61%)	conventional
S2 Comparing results with literature	11(61%)	conventional
S3 Accounting for results	14 (78%)	conventional

M13 (Preparatory information for introducing results) acts as a reminder and connector between sections by reviewing revisions after the pilot study, indicating how results are presented in general and showing methods used or statistical procedures applied. This move is designed to preclude the presentation of the research results.

S1 (Reviewing revisions after the pilot study) reviews the revisions for developing the main study. These revisions are primarily made according to comments from committee members of the defense proposal or according to the problems/difficulties indicated in the pilot study. This is a conventional step.

Example:

Some **revisions** were made according to the comments from committee members. First, confined...only to science disciplines and exclude ..., revise interview questions based on text analysis results... (TD11)

S2 (Providing background information or how results are presented) provides some background information to pave the way for reporting the results or to demonstrate how the results are presented. Background information includes research questions, research purposes, research procedures, justifications and other related information that is generally introduced earlier in the research. This is also a conventional step.

Example:

Now let's move to the research findings. In response to Research Question one: what pragmatic strategies do...? (TD03)

M14 (Reporting results) presents what has been found in the study. Results with relevant evidence are shown in this move. There are two steps under this move.

S1 (Introducing graphics) refers to the description of visual elements (e.g., charts, graphs, or diagrams) to enhance data representation and aid in the effective communication of findings.

Example:

This slide shows a sample transcript of the backchannel strategy used by Thai staff when ... (TD03)

S2 (Reporting major findings) presents the primary results of the research. This step often focuses on clarity and logical presentation. It is critical as it showcases the core findings and directly addresses the research questions or hypotheses.

Example:

Comparing the scores of the pretest and post-test, we can see the CG has a little enhancement and there wasn't a significant difference between these two tests. However, as to the EG...
(TD17)

M15 (Commenting on results) involves interpreting the findings, comparing them with the existing literature, evaluating their significance, and providing explanations for the results.

S1 (Interpreting results) makes claims or generalizations based on the results of the study.

Example:

so we can...this implicates that the lexical approach could help first-year English major students improve their reading comprehension ability. (TD17)

S2 (Comparing results with literature) compares the findings of the study to those of previous research studies.

Example:

But this is inconsistent with previous findings which are attuned to the prosody of a target language... (TD01)

S3 (Accounting for results) explains or gives reasons for differences or unexpected findings.

Example:

A tentative speculation might be that Chinese EMI lecturers possess a more limited repertoire of formal language. (TD11)

Three moves identified in the Results and Discussion Phase were also reported in Yang and Allison's (2003) and Chen and Kuo's (2012) research, which focus on written discourse. However, a new conventional step, M13S1 (Reviewing revisions after the pilot study), was added under M13. This step is absent in both Yang and Allison's (2003) and Chen and Kuo's (2012) research. One of the possible reasons is that, in spoken discourse, the audience benefits significantly from real-time explanations. By reviewing

revisions before presenting the results, presenters lay the groundwork for the audience to better understand and trust those results. In OPTDs, M13S1 plays a crucial role in adding persuasiveness by clearly signaling to the committee and audience that all necessary steps were taken to refine and improve the research. This step is vital for ensuring the accuracy, credibility, and validity of the findings. The present study also reveals varying text lengths for each phase, with the Results and Discussion Phase occupying 48% of the total word count, underscoring its crucial role in explaining the study's findings. This highlights the focus of OPTDs on showcasing research accomplishments and discoveries.

6. Moves/Steps in the Conclusion Phase

In the current study, this phase is comprised of four moves, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Frequency and Status of Moves/Steps in the Conclusion Phase

Move/Step	Frequency	Status
M16 Preparatory information for concluding the study	8(44%)	optional
M17 Summarizing the study	11(61%)	conventional
M18 Evaluating the study		
S1 Indicating limitations	14(78%)	conventional
S2 Indicating significance/advantages	14(78%)	conventional
M19 Deductions from the (research) study		
S1 Making suggestions	10 (56%)	conventional
S2 Recommending further research	10 (56%)	conventional
S3 Drawing pedagogical implications	16 (89%)	conventional

M16 (Preparatory information for concluding the study) restates the background information of the study such as the purpose, research questions/hypotheses, and results, or indicates how conclusions are presented.

Example:

Then let's come to part five, the conclusion and implications.
So this study **aims** to integrate the lexical approach to college English... (TD17)

M17 (Summarizing the study) briefly summarizes the study, including the major findings of the study.

Example:

And this brings us to the **final remarks** of my presentation. This thesis has provided a deeper insight into the L2 listening process from a different perspective. By interpreting L2 listening from a perceptual stance, this project proposed ... (TD01)

M18 (Evaluating the study) evaluates the overall study by pointing out the limitations, indicating the contributions or evaluating the methodology.

S1 Indicating limitations indicates those characteristics of the design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from the research conducted.

Example:

Despite all the findings and implications, the study also has **limitations**. First, the corpora used for the research are relatively small... (TD11)

S2 Indicating significance/advantage allows the presenter to point out the strengths of the study which may be useful for further applications or implications.

Example:

Finally, the conclusion, so the current study has **made a significant contribution to** language learning in the field of language learning and teaching, especially listening pedagogy. So, for teachers, there are great advantages that the teacher can (TDT1)

M19 (Deductions from the study) allows the presenter to infer conclusions by suggesting solutions to the problems identified by the research, pointing out the direction of further research, or drawing pedagogical implications from the results.

S1 (Making suggestions) highlights what the research contributes to the existing knowledge in the field. Additionally, the presenter offers suggestions based on the research findings for solving the problems identified by the study.

Example:

With these limitations in mind, **I strongly recommend**, firstly, using larger corpora that include lectures across different disciplines [...]. Secondly,... (TD11)

S2 (Recommending further research) seeks to provide some possible areas for future studies. Some linguistic signals used to indicate this

step include such expressions as "further studies/research", "future studies/research", and "more studies are needed".

Example:

And then **there is a recommendation for further studies**.

They can explore the teachers' attitudes or opinions of the lexical approach and they can also integrate the corpora into the lexical approach... (TD17)

S3 (Drawing pedagogical implications) states the pedagogical significance of the study or indicates the necessity for pedagogic changes.

Example:

The study also has some implications in the following areas. First, for classroom discourse studies, ... And third, for EMI practitioners, it generates a list of moves that are labeled as formulaic sequences, which might reduce the processing effort for teachers and students. (TD11)

Among these moves, only M16 is optional, while M17, M18, and M19 are conventional. This result suggests that the primary objective of the Conclusion Phase is to evaluate the study's findings, which aligns with the findings of Yang and Alison's (2003) research. Furthermore, M19S3 enjoys the highest frequency in this phase, underscoring the importance of drawing pedagogic implications.

7. Moves/Steps in the Termination Phase

There was only one move under which two steps were found in the Termination Phase.

Table 7

Frequency and Status of Moves/Steps in the Termination Phase

Move/Step	Frequency	Status
M20 Ending the presentation		
S1 Signaling the end of the presentation	13 (72%)	conventional
S2 Expressing thanks	16 (89%)	conventional

M20 (Ending the presentation) terminates the presentation with the following three steps:

S1 (Signaling the end of the presentation) signals the end of the presentation. There are some linguistic signals such as "That's all" or "the end

of".

Example:

And **that's all for my presentation.** (TD18)

S2 (Expressing thanks) expresses thanks to the audience for their attention. This step enjoys the highest frequency under M20. When facing a live audience, presenters often feel a sense of obligation to express gratitude and appreciation towards the audience for dedicating their time to listen. This serves as a means to gracefully conclude the presentation and leave a lasting positive impression.

M20S2, a step for terminating the presentation, is different from M1S2, whose function is to signal the opening of the presentation.

Example:

Thank you for your attention. Khob khun khaa [Thai language].

(TD14)

It is also interesting to note that many non-Thai presenters choose to conclude their presentations with "Khob khun khaa," a phrase in Thai meaning "thank you." This practice not only shows cultural awareness and respect, but also helps to create a positive and memorable connection with the audience. It demonstrates an effort to engage with the local context, which can leave a lasting impression.

Conclusion

The present study analyzed the rhetorical move structure of oral presentations of thesis defenses, combining a top-down approach with a bottom-up approach. In terms of macro-structure, most OPTDs (72%) follow the Ini-Intr-Lr-M-R&D-C-T pattern, combining the traditional Intr-Lr-M-R-D-C structure of written theses, as discussed in previous studies (Amnuai, 2012; Chen & Kuo, 2012) with unique Initiation and Termination phases. This blend of written and spoken discourse features is consistent with prior research (He & Pramoolsook, 2022; Zareva, 2013). In terms of micro-structure, the analysis revealed 20 moves in OPTDs, identifying new, functionally significant steps not documented in prior frameworks. For instance, the conventional step M13S1 (Reviewing revisions after the pilot study), which is absent in both the models of Chen and Kou (2012) and Yang and Allison (2003), emerged as vital for establishing the credibility and validity of the research in the defense context.

However, the current study has a number of limitations, some of which should be addressed in future research. Since the rhetorical move structure

presented in the study was obtained from only 18 oral presentations of online graduate thesis defenses, further research is needed to analyze more oral presentations in order to yield more conclusive findings. In addition, given that all data come from a single academic discipline, further studies with larger corpora from a wider range of disciplines should be conducted to see whether the results would also correspond to other disciplines. Moreover, a contrastive rhetorical move structure across different disciplines could also be conducted, since comparative studies may yield more interesting results.

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Appendix

Analytical Framework for Coding Moves/Steps for Oral Presentations of Graduate Thesis Defenses (Adapted from Chen and Kou, 2012)

Phase	Moves/steps
Initiation	<p>M1 Starting the presentation</p> <p>S1 Greetings and Identifying oneself</p> <p>S2 Thanking the committee members or/and audience or/ chair and/or acknowledgment of supervisor(s)</p> <p>M2 Announcing the topic</p> <p>M3 Outlining the presentation</p> <p>M4 Establishing a territory</p>
Introduction	<p>S1 Providing topic generalization/background</p> <p>S2 Indicating the centrality/importance of the topic</p> <p>S3 Reviewing previous research</p> <p>M5 Establishing a niche</p> <p>S1 Indicating problem(s) and/or need(s) and/or motivation</p> <p>S2 Indicating the research gap in previous research</p> <p>M6 Occupying the niche</p> <p>S1 Indicating research aims/objectives/ purposes</p> <p>S2 Proposing research questions or hypothesis</p>
Literature Review	<p>M7 Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research</p> <p>S1 Surveying the non-research-related phenomena or knowledge claims</p> <p>S2 Claiming centrality</p> <p>S3 Surveying research-related phenomena</p> <p>M8 Creating a research niche (in response to Move7)</p> <p>S1 Counter-claiming</p> <p>S2 Gap-indicating</p> <p>M9 Occupying the research niche</p> <p>S1 Announcing theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks</p>

Phase	Moves/steps
Method Procedure	<p>S2 Announcing research design/processes</p> <p>M10 Introducing the method chapter</p> <p>S1 Outlining the current part of a presentation</p> <p>S2 Providing an overview of the study</p> <p>S3 Indicating approach</p> <p>M11 Describing data collection method and procedure(s)</p> <p>S1 Describing the sample (participants, location, time, etc.)</p> <p>S2 Describing the selection criteria</p> <p>S3 Describing methods and steps in data collection</p> <p>S4 Justifying data collection procedure(s)</p> <p>M12 Elucidating data analysis procedure(s)</p> <p>S1 Explaining specific method(s) of data analysis</p> <p>S2 Recounting data analysis procedure(s)</p> <p>S3 Justifying the data analysis procedure(s)</p> <p>S4 Previewing results</p>
Results Discussion	<p>&</p> <p>M13 Preparatory information for introducing results</p> <p>S1 Providing background information or how results are presented</p> <p>S2 Indicating methods used or statistical procedure applied</p> <p>M14 Reporting results</p> <p>S1 Introducing graphics</p> <p>S2 Reporting major findings</p> <p>M15 Commenting on results</p> <p>S1 Interpreting results</p> <p>S2 Comparing results with literature</p> <p>S3 Accounting for results</p>
Conclusion	<p>M16 Preparatory information for concluding the study</p> <p>via Restating purpose, design, research questions/hypotheses, results, or indicating how conclusions are presented</p> <p>M17 Summarizing the study</p> <p>M18 Evaluating the study</p> <p>S1 Indicating limitations</p> <p>S2 Indicating significance/advantage</p> <p>M19 Deductions from the (research) study</p> <p>S1 Making suggestions</p> <p>S2 Recommending further research</p> <p>S3 Drawing pedagogic implications</p>
Termination	<p>M20 Ending the presentation</p> <p>S1 Signaling the end of the presentation</p> <p>S2 Expressing thanks</p> <p>S3 Inviting comments and questions</p>