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English-written abstracts for Spanish publications: A challenge in the globalization of science

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ABSTRACT

The preeminence of English as the scientific *lingua franca*, together with the ever-present publish-or-perish dilemma, has brought increasing concern on Spanish scientists striving to achieve international recognition. Spanish journal editors try to make their journals look as professional as possible, most of them peer reviewed and their abstracts are listed in the most important databases. However, the problem of language seems to be the issue around which the dissemination of their publications is centered. In this report we examine the English-written abstracts of the *Spanish Journal of Finance and Accounting*, their content and form, and whether or not they are persuasive enough to lure the researcher into reading the paper. While the abstract is considered the first point of contact with the researcher, the expected results will show a rather irregular rendering of the information and, in general, a defective composition of the abstracts, in addition to local issues discussed in their articles. These results suggest a poor dissemination and repercussion of the authors' contribution worldwide.

Keywords: Spanish publications; English-written abstracts; globalization of science; metadiscourse; persuasion.

1. Introduction

Promotion and tenure among academics have placed a lot of pressure on Spanish professionals who are trying to publish in journals with as high an impact factor as possible. This situation brings us back to the old ‘publish-or-perish’ dilemma, a pressure on academics which is compounded in non-English speaking countries with the English language hegemony controversy.

The predominance of English as today’s *lingua franca* in all communication areas would indicate that the solution is at the reach of our hands by simply publishing in English. However, this is not so simple in non-English speaking countries. This issue has been the object of discussion for long, and most particularly since controversial books like Phillipson’s (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism*. Indeed, there are numerous articles in the literature to attest to the fact that English is today’s *lingua franca* in scientific communication.

As far back as the 1980s, over 70% of medical papers were already being published in English (Maher, 1986). While confirming this predominance, Swales (1997) also added that English should not be considered that powerful dinosaur that made all other academic traditions disappear. He argued against this sort of triumphalism by advocating that non-English academics should follow their own publication traditions when publishing either in English or in any other language. Pérez-Llantada, Plo and Ferguson (2011), from a non-Anglophone perspective, focused on the challenges Spanish academics face in the dissemination of their research and, at the same time, how English academic know-how is having an increasing impact on Spanish academics.

Over 25 years ago, St. John (1987, p. 114) already stated that “Spanish academics and research workers, if they wish their work to have any influence on the world of science, will have to publish in English.” According to Butler (2000), French scientists were definitely turning to English journals for the dissemination of their work. In fact, taking St. John’s (1987) sentence in its full sense and consequences, with Meneghini and Parker (2007) we may question whether there is no science beyond English and that we are supposed to forget about publishing in languages other than English.

However, this is not that simple. If Spanish professionals do decide to publish in Spanish, or any other national or local language, and they are satisfied

with the results, they are then committed, first, to guarantee the quality of the papers they publish and, second, to publicize their research adequately. Speaking about the scientific survival of other languages, Maher (1986, p. 206) already pointed out that “language is maintained or declines in response to the amount of (new) information it carries.” Therefore, whether a paper is written in English or in another language, the quality of the paper depends on its linguistic and content realizations (Pho, 2008) and its international circulation will depend on how well it is represented by its abstract. The explicitness of the information, through a persuasive enough medium, will be the fundamental clue to its international dissemination. As Ventola (1994, p. 333) wrote, this information will “guarantee that the reported results of scientific work will circulate worldwide.”

Abstracts have been the concern of applied linguists for quite a long time. Since Borko and Chatman (1963), the abstract has been understood as being just a plain paragraph, referred to as an ‘acceptable abstract’, with an internal structure which included the necessary information related to the content of the paper. The object of discussion, however, switched from general instructions about informative and indicative abstracts given to abstractors and research article authors (Cremmins, 1982) to the structured vs. unstructured abstract debate. The debate started in medicine (Ad Hoc Working Group, 1987; Huth, 1987) and then moved to other disciplines such as psychology (Hartley & Benjamin, 1998; Hartley, 2003), and including whether structured abstracts are more or less accurate than traditional ones (Hartley, 2000). In the business-related disciplines, however, the specific study of abstracts has been practically inexistent, and the majority of journals have published their research articles with the traditional one-paragraph unstructured abstract (Weissberg & Buker, 1990; Hyland, 2000; Swales & Feak, 2009).

The aim of this research was to analyze how Spanish business professionals manage to promote their research when writing in Spanish through the structure and content of their English-written abstracts. These potential difficulties prompted questions such as the following: How can we ensure that our Spanish-written papers have adequate international repercussion? Is the category of the journal enough to ensure that repercussion? Is the abstract the adequate channel to disseminate the article? And finally, will the presence of an abstract in international databases be enough to convince readers to read the paper it announces?

2. Methodology

To answer some of these questions, the English abstracts of a top Spanish journal, the *Revista Española de Financiación y Contabilidad (REFC) – Spanish Journal of Finance and Accounting*–, were analyzed. This journal is ranked eighth among 87 journals in the Impact Factor of Spanish Social Sciences Journals (Índice de Impacto de las Revistas Españolas en Ciencias Sociales, IN-RECS), with a 2011 impact factor of 0.377. It is one of the few Spanish journals listed in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) with an impact factor of 0.163; along with *Universia Business Review*, they are the only Spanish journals listed in the SSCI Business-Finance category. It is surprising, however, that in spite of the fact that *REFC*'s abstracts are included in major business and economics databases, it has little international repercussion with a rather reduced number of international citations.

The corpus represents all the English-written abstracts of the papers published from 2007 to 2011, for a total of 105 finance and accounting abstracts in English, with the following distribution per language: 84 Spanish-written papers, i.e., 80%, and 21 English-written papers, i.e., 20%. For the purpose of this investigation, the English version of all these abstracts was employed, irrespective of the article's original language. Most papers are authored by two or three academics (average 2.51 per article): 10 RAs (9.52%) are single-authored; 38 RAs (36.19%), 2 authors; 50 RAs (47.62%), 3 authors; and 7 RAs (6.67%), 4 authors. A vast majority (94.29%) of RAs are written by Spanish authors. Only on 5 occasions (4.76%) there has been participation of a foreign author together with a Spanish author or authors, and on one occasion (0.95%) the three authors belong to foreign universities. As far as the general subject matter of the paper is concerned, in 71 of the papers (67.62%) the target is Spain; on 16 occasions (15.24%), the European Union; and on one occasion (0.95%), Chile. The remaining 17 papers (16.19%) deal with general theoretical issues on finance and accounting.

The analysis of the abstracts' structure and content was carried out based on Weissberg and Buker's (1990) model of unstructured abstracts shown in Table 1:

| Move | Description |
|--------------------|--|
| Background | = some <i>background information</i> |
| Purpose | = the <i>principal activity</i> (or purpose) of the study and its <i>scope</i> |
| Methodology | = some information about the <i>methodology</i> used in the study |
| Results | = the most important <i>results</i> of the study |
| Conclusion | = a statement of <i>conclusion</i> or <i>recommendation</i> |

Table 1. Order of typical elements included in an abstract (Weissberg & Buker, 1990, p. 186; authors' italics)

Considering writing as a social and communicative engagement between writer and reader, through Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse devices, we focus on how writers project themselves in their texts and, at the same time, how this presence may influence and persuade readers' that the article is worth reading (Hyland, 1998).

3. Analysis of results

The corpus under study, made up of 105 abstracts from *REFC*, yielded the following preliminary data:

| | Spanish abstracts | English abstracts |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| No. of words | 15,953 | 14,349 |
| Sentences | 509 | 563 |
| Mean (in words) | 31.34 | 25.49 |
| Standard deviation | 13.01 | 11.14 |
| Mean no. of words per abstract | 151.93 | 136.66 |
| Standard deviation | 35.08 | 34.28 |

Table 2. Basic data from the corpus

The initial differences shown in Table 2 in the size of abstracts that may be detected comparing one language with the other (151.93 in Spanish vs. 136.66 in English) are considered to be typical of a translated text. As observed by

Perales-Escudero and Swales (2011) in their study of bilingual abstracts from the journal *Ibérica*, the differences in number of words per abstract and their translation usually respond to the fact that Spanish is more periphrastic than English; that is, it uses more multi-word expressions. In addition, Spanish sentences also tend to be longer, with an increasing number of subordinate clauses, than English sentences. This is reflected both in the number of words per sentence (31.34 in Spanish vs. 25.49 in English) and also in the number of sentences (509 in Spanish vs. 563 in English), that is, longer sentences in Spanish result in more sentences in English.

The data from Table 2, in regard to the number of words per sentence in the English abstracts, coincide with the literature; for instance, Hartley (2003, p. 371), in his study of educational psychology texts, reported 24.6 words per sentence in traditional abstracts; while Swales, Irwin and Feak (2009, p. 4) considered a sentence length in political science abstracts of 25 words to be standard. Recently, Piqué-Noguera (2012b, p. 219), in a corpus of business abstracts, found a similar mean sentence length of 24.5 words per sentence.

3.1. Spanish-English structural discrepancies

There are more similarities than dissimilarities in the two sets of abstracts, aside from the typical differences in English-Spanish translation mentioned above. In the corpus analyzed, there are some discrepancies in terms of some information that appears in the Spanish text, but not in English, and vice versa; this is especially noticeable by the number of words per abstract, as can be seen in abstracts nos. 17 and 47 belonging to two Spanish written articles. In both cases, some extra information appears in the Spanish version which is omitted in the English one.

We can also find differences in move appreciation: for instance, a Results move in Spanish (“Los resultados muestran”) becomes a Conclusion move in English (“The research concludes”), as seen in abstract no. 83 from a Spanish written paper; while in article 39, written in English, the Results move of the abstract becomes a Conclusion move in the Spanish version, simply by changing the verb from ‘we find’ to ‘concluimos’. Additionally, in abstract no. 51, the Methodology move in the English abstract is omitted, while in the Spanish

version the size of the sample studied is included (“una muestra de 672 empresas”).

Often the two versions are quite different; for example, abstract no. 47 is composed of two moves: Purpose and Methodology. The two versions coincide in the first of these two moves, but the second move, Methodology, is completely different, as shown in Table 3:

| Extract of Spanish abstract no. 47 | Extract of English abstract no. 47 |
|---|---|
| <hr/> <p>El estudio abarca desde el tercer trimestre del 2000 al cuarto trimestre del 2002. Además se analizan las posibles diferencias en el proceso de formación del precio que pueden surgir como consecuencia de aspectos tales como la relevancia de la información transmitida (anuncios sobre los resultados contables en los diferentes trimestres o previsiones del beneficio anual de los analistas), la precisión de la información comunicada (fuente de divulgación de la noticia) o la cantidad de información previa (empresas grandes frente a empresas pequeñas), diferenciando en todos los casos el carácter bueno o malo de la noticia.</p> <hr/> | <hr/> <p>We study the period comprised between the third quarter of 2002 and the fourth quarter of 2003 for a wide sample of firms listed in the Spanish Stock Market (SIBE).</p> <hr/> |

Table 3. Comparison Spanish-English Methodology move in abstract no. 47¹

There is an obvious difference in the number of words employed by authors in Spanish to express the Methodology applied, with 96 words being reduced to 30 words in English.

¹ Suggested translation of the extract of Spanish abstract no. 47: “The study covers from the third quarter of 2002 to the fourth quarter of 2002. In addition, possible differences in the process of prices formation that may arise as a consequence of different aspects are analyzed; for instance, the relevance of the information transmitted (advertisements about accounting results in the different quarters, or analysts’ previsions of annual benefits), the precision of the transmitted information (source of the transmission of the news), or the amount of previous information (large firms versus small firms), distinguishing in all cases the type, good or bad, of the news item.”

3.2. Move presence in abstracts

The second important area of results has to do with move presence in abstracts. Even though Swales and Feak (2010, p. 172; their italics) contended that “abstracts have the *potential* for all five moves,” in most cases not all of them are included; thus, authors should strive towards writing fully informative abstracts. This five-move presence is not reflected in the majority of the 105 abstracts of the corpus under study. In most of them, the three middle moves predominate as it is also reflected in the literature. See, for instance, the comparison established in Table 4:

| Moves | Present research | Piqué-Noguera, 2012a, pp. 115- 116 | Kafes, 2012, p. 210 |
|-------------|------------------|--|------------------------|
| | n=105 (%) | n=80 (%) | n=46 (%) |
| Background | 36 (34.29%) | 43 (53.75%) | 17 (37%) |
| Purpose | 103 (98.10%) | 78 (97.50%) | 46 (100%) |
| Methodology | 70 (66.67%) | 61 (76.25%) | 45 (98%) |
| Results | 82 (78.10%) | 74 (92.50%) | 46 (100%) |
| Conclusion | 27 (25.71%) | 32 (40.00%) | 32 (70%) |

Table 4. Presence of moves in three sets of abstracts

As Table 4 reflects, this irregular presence of moves is consistent with the literature although this does not mean that they are well-written abstracts. Hartley and Betts (2009, p. 2012), studying weak points of traditional abstracts in several humanities disciplines, also underscored a strong presence of the three central moves (Aim, 79%; Methods, 86%, and Results, 86%), although the abstracts’ content had to do mostly with word limitations. However, as has been proven in this research, the number of words in an abstract does not necessarily reflect a better written abstract.

Even though most journals place word limitations on the abstract, the question remains whether the information provided is enough to convince the research to read the paper and perhaps cite it. In the guidelines for authors of

the journal under study, the editors simply require that an abstract in Spanish should include the research paper's objectives and conclusions ("planteamientos y conclusiones") in a maximum of 150 words. Curiously, however, no indication of such objectives and conclusions is made in the English guidelines for authors in regard to the English-written abstracts.

Therefore, it is not just the responsibility of the writer, but also the journal's editorial staff, to allow for more space as well as to give more detailed guidelines for a better written abstract. Previous research already pointed out that academic manuals do not contain sufficient useful information for writers, especially for young writers, on how to write an abstract. These specific instructions on abstracts are scarce in most manuals; for example, Carreras Panchón (1994), Day (1988), and Carlino (2005), among others, do not offer sufficient details on writing abstracts. The majority offer commonplace information. A good exception is Posteguillo Gómez's (2002) essay on abstracts in which he underscored the disciplinary variation in abstracts and, of course, Swales and Feak's (2009) directives on the writing abstracts. Additionally, Pho (2008) further added that this still remains an issue when he claimed that the importance of abstracts should not be underestimated since it is the first part of the article that researchers read; their structure and content, therefore, are as important as their linguistic realization through moves.

3.3. Persuasive strength in abstracts

Academic discourse has often been taken as being too dry and impersonal, although, as Hyland (2002) remarked, very much depends on disciplinary variability. For instance, hard sciences undervalue the author's personal role, while humanities and social sciences emphasize it. In large texts, such as the research article, the authors' presence is especially manifested through the five interactional devices (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mentions). The success of the abstract in its dissemination role, which implies persuasion to lure the researcher acquire and read the paper it represents, will no doubt depend on the presence of interactional devices. See, for example, the results obtained in Table 5:

| Interactional devices | Finance and Accounting abstracts | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| | n | ‰ |
| Hedges | 118 | 8.22 |
| Boosters | 103 | 7.18 |
| Attitude markers | 22 | 1.53 |
| Engagement markers | 13 | 0.91 |
| Self-mentions | 184 | 12.82 |

Table 5. Presence of interactional devices in the 105 finance and accounting abstracts

These results show that the interactional devices in this corpus of finance and accounting abstracts are not as frequent as it might be expected, especially because the corpus employed may be considered an applied discipline.

- a) *Hedges*: The literature usually shows higher results in hedges; for instance, Piqué-Noguera (2012b, p. 169) reported a significant increase with 11.76‰ in business abstracts, similar to what was reported by Gillaerts and Van de Velde (2010, p. 133) with 10.40‰ in applied linguistics abstracts. This increase of hedges is probably due to disciplinary variability, since business and especially applied linguistics discourses are more expository than finance and accounting, which are usually more factual.

In the abstracts from finance and accounting research papers the typical modals as hedges can be found ('may', on 7 occasions; 'could', 9; and 'would', 12) together with the adjective 'possible' (7 instances) and the verb 'suggest' (12 instances), and including a double hedge, as in example [1]:

[1] This methodology **should** make **possible** to obtain [...] (Abstract no. 78; underlining has been added).

- b) *Boosters*: Although recognizing "potentially diverse positions" (Hyland, 2005, p. 53), boosters are most often used to close down alternatives and express the author's strong position on a proposition. With this purpose, verbs like 'show' or 'find' are most common in the corpus analyzed. Also a combination of markers, as in example [2] below, in which a booster, 'actually', is followed by an attitude marker, 'important', reinforced with the adverb 'very':

[2] [...] information is **actually** a very **important** field research. (Abstract no. 5).

There is also a manifested variability among disciplines and even within business and related disciplines. For example, while in this research with finance and accounting research article abstracts we obtained 7.18% of boosters, in specific business abstracts Piqué-Noguera (2012a, p. 169) reported 5.44%. This disciplinary variability is further emphasized when compared with applied linguistics, as mentioned by Gillaerts and Van de Velde (2010, p. 133) who reported 12.80 boosters per 1,000 words.

- c) *Attitude markers*: Through attitude markers authors reveal their stance towards the propositional content; however, these devices are not very common in this set of abstracts, if we only apply Hyland's (2005) checklist. We only found 1.05 instances per 1,000 words, which is very low compared with the 8.30 attitude markers per 1,000 words reported by Gillaerts and Van de Velde's (2010, p. 133) in the results obtained in their study of applied linguistics abstracts.

This apparent lack of attitude markers, however, is compensated by certain expressions not included in Hyland's checklist. If, for instance, the paper contributes to the solution of a given situation, the authors' attitude is shown by underscoring the relevance of their contribution, as in example [3]:

[3][...] this study contribute to **better knowledge, understanding and explanation** of the changes that the organization of study has experimented to carry out this implementation process. (Abstract no. 55)

Authors' involvement in the text to promote their research can also be manifested by showing its timeliness and because it is of interest to the readership, as in example [4]:

[4]The **interest and opportunity** of this study are that the innovative teaching methods were implemented before the effective integration of the degree in Business Administration into the European High Education Area. (Abstract no. 104)

Authors may also want to remark that the newly applied methodology has never been used in their discipline; thus, they manifest the importance of such a decision, as in example [5]:

[5]Although the efficiency of this method has been proved in various application fields, **it is unknown in the economic-business area.** (Abstract no. 26)

Most typical is the expression that the authors' study may be original and important in their field and that it constitutes a novelty in the discipline, as in example [6]:

[6]The results obtained reveal **significant and novel aspects** concerning the management of intellectual capital [...]. (Abstract no. 69)

Similar to abstract no. 69, in abstracts nos. 84 and 95 we also find an indication of the 'novelty' of the research presented. It is striking, however, to observe how the authors of abstract no. 4 have decided to exclude the expression of praise in the English version of the abstract. See, for example, an extract of this abstract (Table 6) in which the English has omitted an important contribution to the discipline (i.e. the underlined words in the Spanish version):

| Extract of Spanish abstract no. 4 | Extract of English abstract no. 4 |
|--|---|
| <hr/> <p>“Este aspecto constituye una aportación plenamente novedosa y necesaria a esta línea de investigación, llegando a la conclusión de que las empresas [...]”</p> <hr/> | <hr/> <p>“We conclude that firms [...]”</p> <hr/> |

Table 6. Comparison Spanish-English abstract no. 4

This example, which refers to the Conclusion move, constitutes a compound attitude marker and might certainly call the attention of the reader when indicating that it “constitutes a totally new and necessary contribution to this line of research” (underlined text in the Spanish extract); surprisingly, it is simply omitted from the English version of the abstract. A similar situation is presented in abstract no. 74 (Table 7), in which the attitude marker is minimized in the English translation in which we find no reference that this research represents “a first comparative study on [...]”:

| | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Extract of Spanish abstract no. 74 | Extract of English abstract no. 74 |
| “Este trabajo presenta el primer estudio comparado [...]” | “This paper investigates [...]” |

Table 7. Comparison Spanish-English abstract no. 74

There are a few other examples of attitude markers that have been observed in a comparison of both sets of abstracts, usually omitted in the English version: for example, abstract no. 11 omits the Spanish “inequívocamente” (“unmistakably”) from the Results move; in abstract no. 12, “A diferencia de estudios anteriores,” that is, “Unlike previous studies,” through which the Spanish version of the abstract enhances the value of the authors’ research, is also omitted in the English version. In abstract no. 53, a double attitude marker (“important” + “positive”), “un **importante** efecto **positivo**” has been rendered as a simple marker in English, “an **important** effect,” which loses some of the emphasis on the marketization role of the abstract placed in Spanish.

Nevertheless, adding these last unclassified attitude markers to the previous 22 (Table 5) we obtain 33 markers; that is, an average of 2.30 markers per 1,000 words are present in this corpus of 105 abstracts. It is, nonetheless, a very low average of markers, since they are the main persuasive means that can be introduced in abstracts to attract the readership. Additionally, it is also a very low mean score compared to other disciplines, such as applied linguistics, in which Gillaerts and Van de Velde (2010) reported 8.30 markers per 1,000 words in abstracts.

- d) *Engagement markers*: in this set of finance and accounting abstracts, engagement markers are practically inexistent, except for pronouns being used inclusively. The inclusive use of personal and possessive pronouns makes the reader participate in the proposition –that is, ‘we’ (‘you’, the reader, and ‘I’, the author) can improve ‘our’ knowledge–, as in example [7]:

[7] In this way, **we** can improve **our** knowledge about this type of organizational change and increase the efficacy of organizations when they implement it. (Abstract no. 18)

In this corpus of abstracts, 4 inclusive ‘our’, 4 inclusive ‘us’ and 2 inclusive ‘we’ are present; that is, a total of 0.70 inclusive pronouns per 1,000 words. Compared to previous research of business abstracts, a low average of 0.39 inclusive pronouns per 1,000 words was reported (Piqué-Noguera, 2012a, p. 222).

In this review of metadiscourse devices in abstracts, the role of rhetorical questions, as an engagement marker, must be underscored, even though there is only one example in this corpus, as can be read in example [8].

[8] Can size, book-to-market and momentum be risk factors that explain the returns in the Spanish Capital Market? (Abstract no. 17)

The authors’ idea of including a rhetorical question is to attain, as best as they can, the readers’ involvement, although in an indirect way; it is a sort of a strategic use of reverse psychology which will most likely produce the same effect in readers as a direct call of attention (Blankenship & Craig, 2006).

- e) *Self-mentions*: the most common interactional markers employed by authors in this set of finance and accounting abstracts are self-mentions, with 12.82 markers per 1,000 words, even above previously reported research in business abstracts with an average of 9.82 self-mentions per 1,000 words (Piqué-Noguera, 2012a, p. 222). Table 8 shows the distribution of these markers:

| Self-mentions | n | % |
|----------------------|----------|----------|
| ‘we’ | 131 | 9.13 |
| ‘our’ | 42 | 2.93 |
| ‘us’ | 7 | 0.49 |
| ‘I’ | 1 | 0.07 |
| ‘the author’ | 3 | 0.21 |
| Total | 184 | 12.82 |

Table 8. Self-mentions in the 105 finance and accounting abstracts

As can be observed in Table 8, ‘we’ is the most frequently used pronoun which appears in more than half of the abstracts in our corpus (n=64) for a total of 131 uses. It is more common to find the first plural pronoun in English texts than in Spanish. While in English we often see constructions with ‘we’ plus an active verb, Spanish authors often resort to reflexive constructions.

In this set of abstracts, of the 10 one-authored papers, on three occasions the English abstract contains the first plural personal pronoun, while in the Spanish text the use of the reflexive expression is found as in Table 9.

| <u>Extract of Spanish abstract no. 38</u> | <u>Extract of English abstract no. 38</u> |
|--|---|
| “En primer lugar, se comprueba la existencia de una discontinuidad [...]” | “First, we examine whether there is a discontinuity [...]” |

Table 9. Comparison Spanish-English abstract no. 38

As Table 8 shows, the use of the first person singular pronoun is rare in these texts; in fact, there is only one example in this corpus:

[9] Consistent with the theoretical predictions **I** find that: i) given a book value [...]. (Abstract no. 10)

In addition to personal pronouns, authors can also be identified in the text through expressions like ‘the author/s’ or ‘the writer/s’; in this corpus, only the expression ‘the author’ is present and it appears on three occasions, all in the plural form; example [10] shows one of these:

[10] **The authors** suggest that making it compulsory to compile an actuarial balance every year would be beneficial [...]. (Abstract no. 88)

Irrespective of the number of instances which we may call persuasive notes of attention, given the circumstances analyzed earlier –namely, the difficulty of reaching an international audience because these articles are not written in English– it must be pointed out that in these abstracts there is a fundamental lack of direct speech addressed to readers, especially through attitude and engagement markers, through which they could be persuaded to read the articles.

4. Conclusions

Swales (1998) wrote that “the overall rise of English cannot be contested, [but] we need to encourage research and development programmes for academic languages other than English.” Nevertheless, this writing of research in Spanish must be accompanied by well-written and informative abstracts since they are often the only opportunity their authors will have to attract readers.

The journal chosen for this research has sufficient prestige to figure in the higher ranks of Spanish publications; however, its scarce international repercussion is not due exclusively to the fact that it mainly publishes in Spanish. This research has pretended to underscore other significant reasons which must be kept in mind:

- The corpus dealt with is aimed at almost exclusive local issues to the detriment of the papers dissemination;
- The limited space allocated to abstracts may also contribute to produce abstracts with incomplete information;
- Abstracts, as science gatekeepers, often provide insufficient information in terms of completeness and accuracy;
- There is not enough persuasive language to attract the readership; a high percentage of success of an article depends on how well it is publicized through its abstract;
- Finally, journals’ editorial staffs provide insufficient guidelines for the writing of more complete and better abstracts.

Above all, however, is the lack of awareness on both, authors and journal editors, of the real importance of abstracts and of their role. Sternberg (2000, p. 37) begins his article with the following question and answer: “What could be more boring than titles and abstracts, or than an article entitled ‘Titles and Abstracts’? Yet few aspects of the article are more important than, you guessed it, titles and abstracts.” He ends this section by saying that we should “[r]emember that most people will read your abstract only if your title interests them, and will read your article only if your abstract interests them” (Sternberg, 2000, p. 40).

Therefore, the awareness of the importance of abstracts should lead to a better publicized journal and their articles through well-structured abstracts. This would, no doubt, counterbalance the added thematic and language difficulties authors face when promoting their articles. Thus, the role of abstracts should be brought to the attention of business communicators and professional educators; as Pho (2008, p. 247) wrote, “[t]he novice writer needs to know not only what the prototypical moves of an abstract in their discipline are but also how to organize them and how to realize each move linguistically.”

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