

## Pedagogical Implications of Genre Analyses of Professional Letters for Teaching English for Specific Purposes

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### ABSTRACT

Genre analyses of letters in Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) provide implications for its letter writing pedagogy. Their focus is on identifying the communicative purposes and commonly used rhetorical patterns in professional letters. However, it seems that there is a scarcity of literature that explored types of genre analyses of letters and their pedagogical implications. Therefore, this study explored genre analyses of professional letters to identify types of comparisons and their pedagogical usefulness. Document analysis and thematic analysis were employed to identify the types of genre analyses of letters and their pedagogic use. The study identifies three key types of comparisons in letter genre analysis: 1) letters within the same domain to understand shared structural and rhetorical features, 2) letters by writers from different nationalities to reveal cultural influences on communication styles, and 3) letters by professionals and students to highlight differences in experience and mastery of genres. The genre analyses of letters revealed evidence of diversities in relation to communicative purposes of the letters and cultural expectations related to the genres. This study is expected to provide a theoretical understanding of the rationale for the use of comparative approach to genre analysis, which can be employed by future genre analysts who explore the impact of culture on genre production.

**Keywords:** genre analysis, communicative purpose, letter writing, move analysis, pedagogy

### INTRODUCTION

Writing letters used in professional contexts (i.e., business, law, academic and medicine) with appropriate organization and style is a demanding task for many undergraduates of learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as they should pay attention to specific genre conventions. To communicate effectively in workplace letter writing, undergraduates should have a sufficient command of a specific generic structure of correspondence used at target situations (Qasim et al., 2015). Therefore, genre analysts have examined rhetorical structures of different types of letters used in business, legal and academic contexts to increase English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners' awareness of rhetorical patterns. Genre analyses of

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professional letters seem diverse, and there is a scarcity of research related to exploring the diversity in genre analyses of professional letters. Therefore, this study examined selected genre analyses of professional letters to identify the types of comparisons made and different pedagogical concerns related to their specific use of the comparative approach to genre analysis.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on three canonical approaches of analysing professional genres. Firstly, the ESP approach to genre analysis focuses on the analysis of text organizational patterns. It has given rise to a text analytical approach: move analysis, introduced by Swales (1990) with the CARS Model (1980), originally employed to analyse introductions of research articles. In the model, Swales (1980) proposed that the communicative purposes of a genre define a genre, and a genre comprises a class of communicative events and the members who write and read the genre share a set of communicative purposes (p.58). Thus, the shared communicative purpose of texts that belong to the same genre results in having a similar 'structure, style, content and intended audience' (ibid., p. 58). This common purpose unifies and guides the creation and understanding of the genre.

Secondly, Bhatia (1993) extended the Swalesean move analysis in two ways: 1) by applying it more generally to several other professional genres in legal and business domains, and 2) by extending the role of context to bring in several socio-cognitive factors related to the rationale for genres (Bhatia, 2012, p. 240). These extensions highlight the complexity of genres and emphasize the importance of context in shaping genre conventions. Thirdly, the comparative approach of analysing genres of different cultures, theoretically employing Kaplan's (1966) notion of contrastive rhetoric was employed by many genre analysts. It was first used in his study of international students' writing in English on the interference of first language thought and writing patterns with writing in a second language. Similarly, it has become a canonical theoretical model, used in many move analyses of letters to explore rhetorical patterns and lexico-grammatical choices across genres of different cultures. Genre analysts of professional letters employ the theories and approaches of analysing professional genres introduced by Swales (1980), Bhatia (1993, 2012) and Kaplan (1996). These frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of how professional genres function through their structures, purposes, and contextual factors.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology employed in this study is document analysis, which is "applicable to qualitative case studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organization, or program" (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994 cited in Bowen, 2009, p. 29). Further, qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to identify, analyse and interpret themes related to the types of comparative move analyses of letters and their pedagogic use. The sample of this study included seven comparative move analyses of letters published online from 2007 to 2019. All the studies selected for the analysis were comparative genre analyses of letters that employed Swales's (1990) approach to move analysis in segmenting moves and identifying their communicative functions. This combined approach

allowed for an in-depth examination of how move analysis has been applied and taught across different studies of professional letters.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The seven studies analysed have presented implications for developing letter writing skills of learners. As per their research concerns, the studies were categorized into the following three types of comparative analyses. This classification helps to clearly understand the different approaches and focuses within the field of letter writing pedagogy.

### **Comparison of Letters of the Same Domain**

Genre analyses within the same domain revealed diverse communicative purposes and key features essential for teaching each genre effectively. Chuna and Montane (2019) and Hanel (2007) focus on similarities and differences of the move structures of two or more genres of the same domain. They analysed rhetorical patterns of five Spanish genres of the same domain (written by laymen to administrators) that cause the greatest writing difficulties: job application letters, letters of allegation, complaint, claim, and application. The intention of their study was to provide an understanding of the characteristics of each genre. The contrastive analysis included the use of statistical techniques to analyse quantitative data to identify significant differences among these textual genres. One of the pedagogical concerns is to identify the most frequent move structures of the five genres.

Building on previous comparative genre studies, Hanel (2007) compared the rhetorical patterns of business collection letters of three stages: initial, intermediate, and the demand stage. According to Hanel (2007), the move patterns of each type of letter and communicative strategies (i.e., persuasion, face-saving strategies) used at each stage of debt collection provide insights to ESP teachers and learners of the field of business credit management (p.72). The genre analyses of the same domain provided the diversity of the communicative purposes of each genre and the salient features that has to be included in pedagogies of teaching the genres.

### **Comparisons of Professional Letters of Different Nationalities**

The second type of contrastive genre analysis of professional letters is related to comparing the rhetorical patterns of the letters produced by different nationalities. The reason for this comparison is to identify shared generic structures and highlight differences in rhetorical moves across cultures, helping to understand how socio-cultural contexts influence the way professional letters are written in different countries. For example, Thumnong and Tongpoon-Patanasorn (2017) compared communicative purposes and strategies used to achieve the communicative purposes (moves and steps) used in the job application letters written by six nationalities in the Asian region. Their results suggest that job application letters are based on the socio-cultural setting within which they are used. Such cross-cultural analyses are essential for developing effective pedagogical approaches in teaching professional writing in diverse cultural contexts.

Comparing letters from different countries, such as those written by native and non-native speakers or students from Taiwan and Canada, helps identify shared structures and differences

in writing moves. These insights aid teaching and improve intercultural communication. The main reason for comparing letters across different contexts or countries (i.e., business quotation call letters by non-native and native employees; Qasim, 2015); cover letters written by Taiwanese and Canadian college students (Hou, 2013), and English and Persian business enquiry letters (Jalilifar & Beitsayyah, 2011) is to identify the common generic structure and compare and contrast moves commonly used by the writers of each county. These comparisons offer key insights for teaching genres, helping educators address cross-cultural differences and improve intercultural communication.

### **Comparison of Professional Letters Written by Expert and Novice Writers**

Comparative genre analysts of letters have explored how cultural and professional backgrounds influence the rhetorical patterns in letters written by novice and expert writers to better understand variations in communication styles across different contexts. For instance, Nguyen and Millier (2012) compared scenario English business letters written by Vietnamese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students and authentic business letters written by business professionals. As per their study, student culture can be considered as a small culture in which novice writers represent the smallest entity, and professional writers represent the bigger culture (Holliday, 1994 cited in Atkinson, 2004) of expert writers of the genre. Nguyen and Millier (2012) presented similarities as well as difference in the rhetorical patterns of business letters that reflect the norms and practices of each culture. Comparative genre analysts have explored how cultural and professional backgrounds shape the rhetorical patterns of letters written by novice and expert writers, revealing both similarities and differences that reflect the distinct norms and practices of each culture.

The above three types of genre analyses of letters are based on contrastive rhetoric of Kaplan (1966), Swalesan move analysis and Bhatia's theories of analysing professional genres, and they proved that what is rhetorically effective in one culture may not be effective in another culture as genres vary across cultures and contexts. "Communicators in the global business communities increasingly encounter pluralized national and cultural identities and need to deal with the boundaries between them in multiple ways" (Starke-Meyerring, 2005, p. 477 cited in Nguyen and Millier, 2012, p.2). In business letter writing, the writers should not be restricted to the traditional approach of using writing conventions pertaining to their native cultures to achieve effectiveness in communicating with members of different cultures in which English is used as a lingua franca. Comparative genre analyses show that rhetorical patterns in letters vary across cultures and contexts, highlighting the need for writers to move beyond native conventions to communicate effectively in diverse settings.

The common purpose of the studies analysed was to provide ESP educators with teaching aids to increase learner's awareness of the generic structure of letters written by different cultural contexts. The findings of the comparative move analyses of letters confirmed Swales's (1990) definition of genre as a class of communicative events, and the members of which share some set of communicative purposes which are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and

style (p. 58). Comparative genre analyses reveal cultural differences in letter writing and aim to equip ESP educators with tools to teach these variations, supporting Swales's (1990) view that genres are defined by shared communicative purposes shaping their structure and style.

## CONCLUSION

This study analysed genre analyses of letters to identify the classification of the comparisons of letters and their pedagogical usefulness. It was identified that there are three types of comparative studies which are popular among genre analysts of letters: 1) comparison of letters of the same domain, 2) letters written by writers of different nationalities, and 3) comparison of letters written by cultural groups (i.e., professionals and students). The growing body of genre analyses of letters has revealed evidence of various cultural diversities in relation to rhetorical patterns of the letters. These insights are valuable for developing teaching strategies that address cultural differences in professional communication.

This study is expected to contribute to an understanding of the rationale for the use of comparative approach to genre analysis of letters that can be employed by future genre analysts who prefer examining the impact of culture on genre production. More comparative genre analyses such as comparing student and professional genres could be conducted by future genre analysts to present useful teaching models and knowledge related to cultural norms of genre construction among professionals which would guide ESP learners producing effective letters in workplace. This approach has the potential to advance cross-cultural communicative competence and strengthen the applicability of genre-based pedagogy in diverse professional contexts.

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